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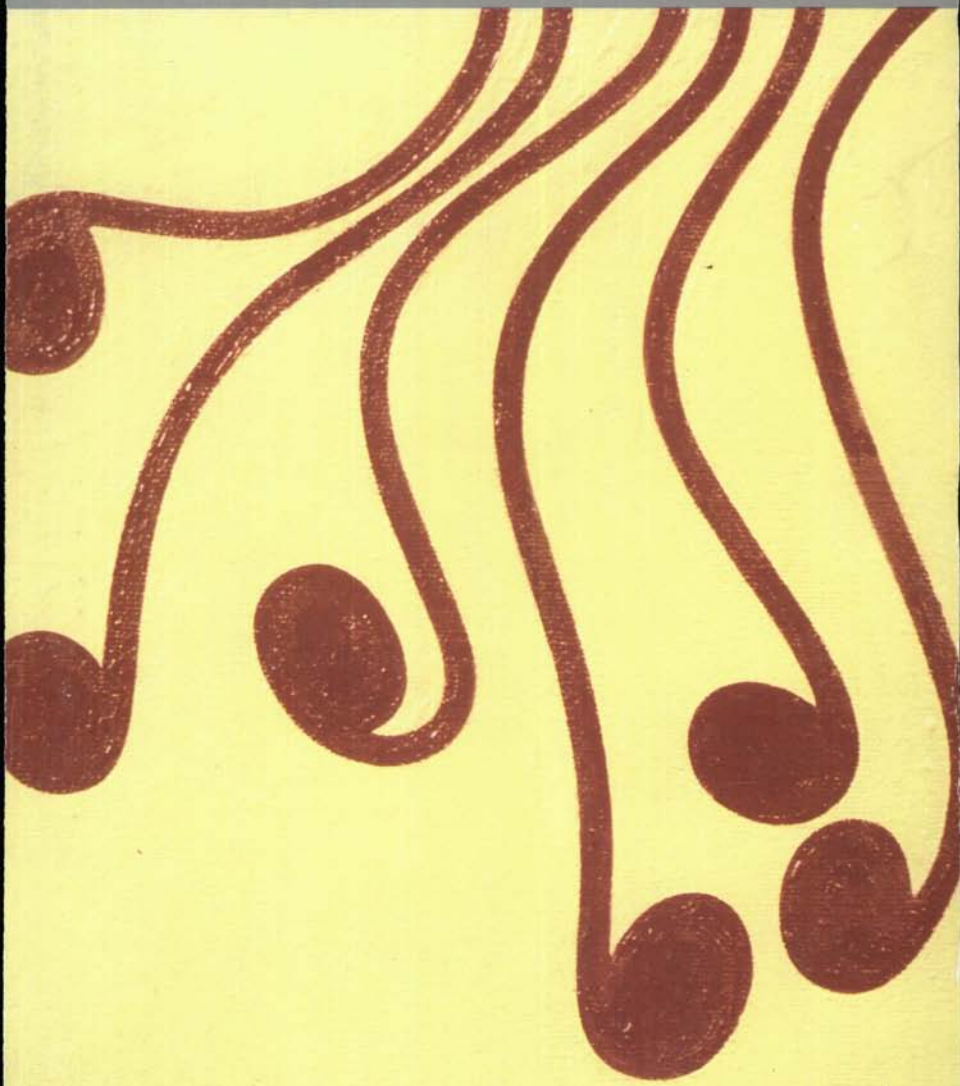

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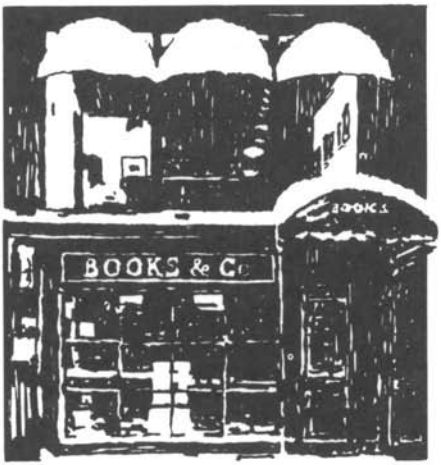

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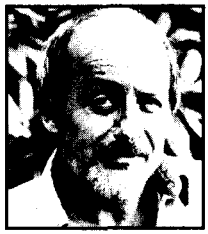

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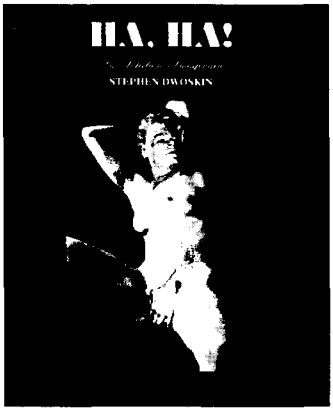

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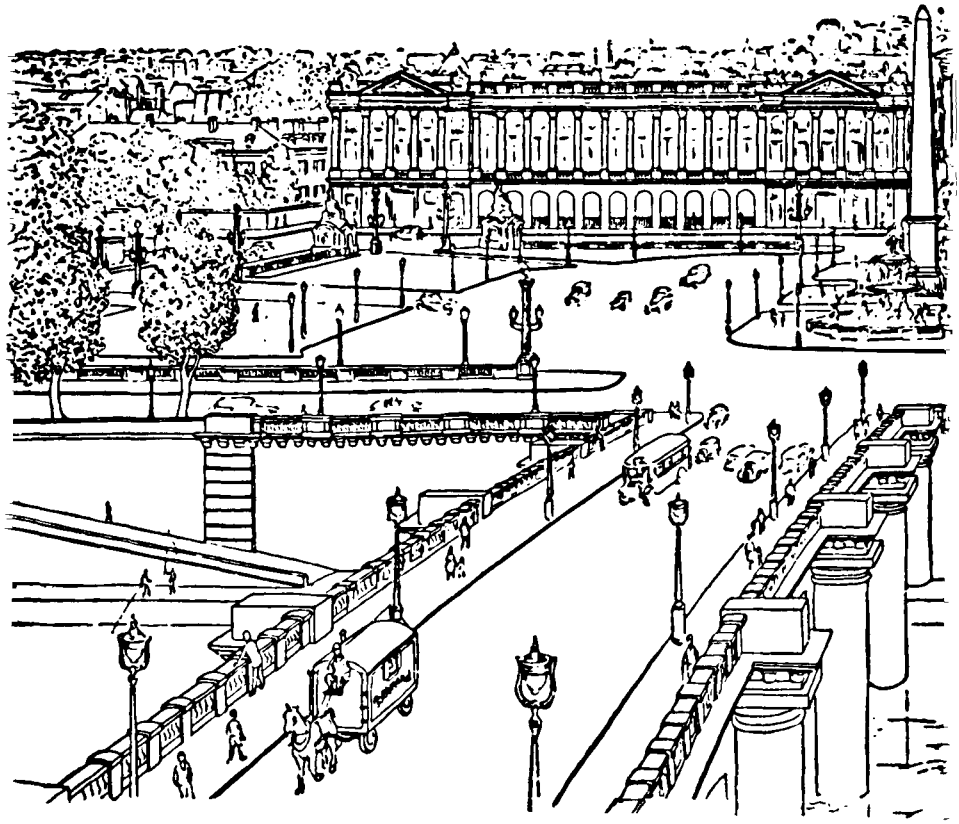

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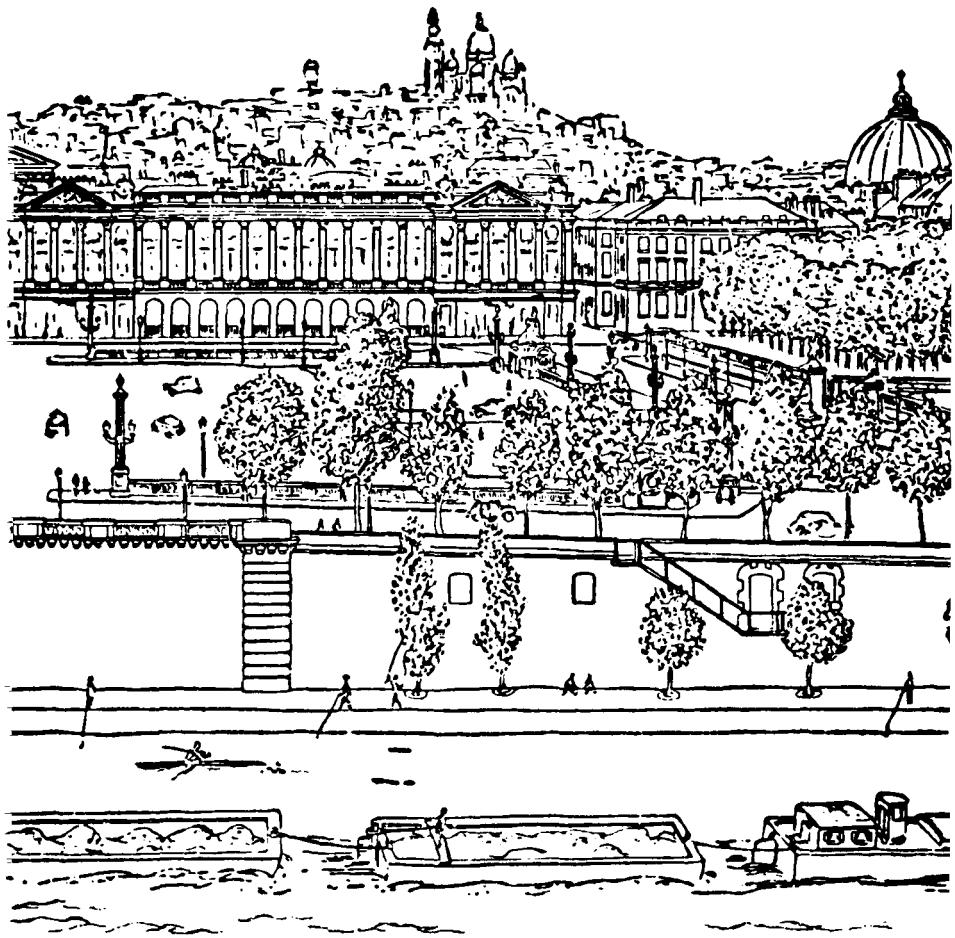

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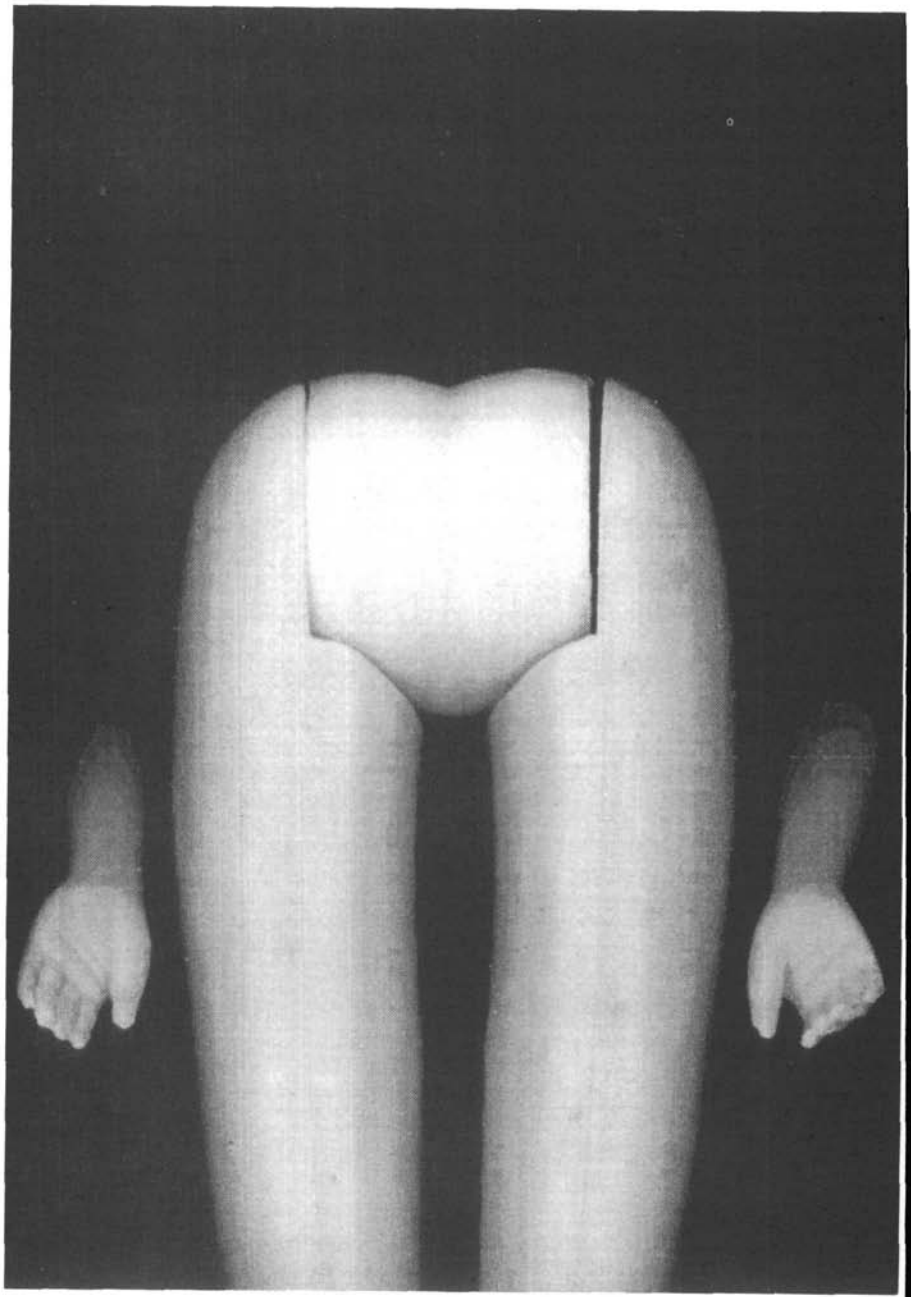

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Galway Kinnell

Lackawanna

Possibly a child is not damaged immediately
but only after some time has passed.
When the parent who sits on the edge
of the bed leans over and moves an elbow
or a forearm or a hand across the place
where the child's torso divides into legs
at last gets up and goes to the door and turns
and says in an ordinary voice, "Good night,"
then in exactly eight minutes a train
in the freight yards on the other side of town
howls, its boxcar loaded up, its doors
rusted shut, its wheels clacking
over the tracks *lacka wanna lacka.*
It may be that the past has the absolute force
of the law that visits parent upon child
unto the third or fourth generation, and the implacability
of vectors, which fix the way a thing
goes reeling according to where it was touched.
What is called spirit may be the exhaust-light
of toil of the kind a person goes through
years later to take any unretractable step
out of that room, even a step no longer
than a platinum-iridium bar in a vault in Paris,
and flesh the need afterwards to find
the nearest brasserie and mark with both elbows
on the zinc bar the start and the finish.
Never mind. The universe is expanding.
Soon they won't know where to look to find you.
There will be even more room when the sun dies.
It will be eight minutes before we know it is dead.
Plenty of time for the ordinary human acts

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that will constitute our final mayhem.
In the case of a house there may be less room
when the principal occupants die, especially
if they refuse to leave and keep on growing.
Then in a few years the immaterial bulk
of one of them padding up from the dark
basement can make the stairs shriek
and the sleeper sit up, pivot out of bed, knock
an arm on the dresser, stand there shaking
while the little bones inside the elbow cackle.
The mind can start rippling again at any time
if what was thrown in was large, and thrown in early.
When the frequency of waves increases,
so does the energy. If pressure builds up,
someone could die from it. If they had been
able to talk with him, find out what he was going through,
the children think it would not have been him.
Inquiring into the situation of a thing
may alter the comportment, size, or shape of it.
The female nurse's elbow, for instance,
bumping a penis, could raise it up,
or the male doctor's hand, picking it up
and letting it drop a couple of times for
unexplained medical reasons, could slacken it.
Or vice versa. And the arm passing across it,
like Ockham's razor grabbed off God's chin
eight minutes before the train howls,
could simplify it nearly out of existence.
Is it possible, even, that Werner Heisenberg,
boy genius, hit on his idea in eight minutes?
The train sounds its horn and clickets over
the tracks *lacka wanna* shaking up
a lot of bones trying to lie unnoticed
in the cemeteries. It stops to let off
passengers in a town, as the overturned grail
of copper and tin, lathed and fettled off
to secure its pure minor tierce, booms out

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from the sanctus-turret those bulging notes
which, having been heard in childhood,
seem to this day to come from heaven.
So in memory, an elbow, which is without flesh,
touching a penis, which is without bone,
can restart the shock waves of being the one chosen,
even in shame, in a childhood of being left out.
But no one gets off. And a hand
apports in the center of a room suddenly
become empty, which the child has to fill
with something, with anything, with the ether
the Newtonian physicists manufactured
to make good the vacuums in the universe
or the nothing the God of the beginning
suctioned up off the uninhabited earth
and held all this time and now must exhale
back down, making it hard, for some, to breathe.
The hand suspended in the room still has
a look of divinity; every so often
it makes sweet sounds—music can't help it; like maggots
it springs up anywhere. The umbilical string
rubs across the brain, making it
do what it can, sing.

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Two Poems by Jennifer Ashton

Privileges of Travel

You can't forget you purchased it;
this private tour moves you

by lurch and swing, recrossing
uneven lines of rail and pitch-

black roads: the wide relief
of scenery. You hurry

toward a river, toward the first
suspension bridge, aloof

as if the whirr of tires were
the only sound among the sounds

repeating a belief that settles
like a liquor on your lips,

like a memory straying
among your dreams in slow parade.

The movement is uncertain:
is it light escaping other

travelers, or the shallow
curve of your own route

that disappears into the rearview
mirror, into the eye

of the driver, barely missing
yours, a glance too long to withdraw?

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Recover it on lamplit
streets and past close doorways

where couples end their conversations
under chilly clouds,

and the city spills its private glow
through narrow windows,

over the pause of one late worker
in her heavy jacket,

over the silence of the taxi driver
before he touches the door,

over the passenger who sleeps,
listening for the stars,

as the moon begins to swarm
with a papery ash of moths.

Apocalypse is an Elegy

The metaphysician loves your dress Jesus and so do we.
Nothing more sumptuous than raglan sleeves
nape and collarbone under milky light.
We just can't stop talking about that dress.
Me and the boys in the boat. Midst unguent fog,
our nets splayed out like ambergris upon the sodden shore,
these nights we wait together, stupid in our fishing clothes,
and now we wish you'd raise your hand, blithely toward your
lips—
like a kiss, we long for that extinguishing smile.

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We'd have you darning, but that's nostalgia too,
completely lost on us since you came back
and everything's indifferent to repair, even the sky—
weatherless and graphic. Tell us Jesus where'd you get the dress.
We don't find threads like that at market,
now the merchants gather by the streetlamps, shirts gaping
to the blue assaults of evening, and the dogs
yield their torpor to the cinema of contemplation.
This is reckless sleep, this is tomorrow
and the next day.

But what's not to love?
We plod about the gleaming fish heaps in the dark
eating our clean bread the way we used to eat your blessings.
Sit with us and raise your glass.
Say our names and we will drown with pleasure.

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Four Poems by Eileen Hennessy

Crossing

It is seven A.M. and raining
when I awaken in my berth
in Kansas City, Mo. The Midwest.
Truman country. The station
is big enough and stone enough
for any president. Outside,
men in yellow windbreakers stand,
hands in pockets, shuffling feet,
not looking up to the window
where they would see me
lying in state in pink pajamas.

Last night I crossed their country.
In the dining car a man talked
about riding in coach, not sleeper.
"So as not to be alone," he said.
"After fifty years of marriage,
being alone is hell."
The word has long been out:
Hell is other people.

It is not my country,
that hot and bitter fault
where life-plates grind at odds.
I always ride in sleeper.
Lie back in solitary state
and try to measure on the map
how far I have come and gone,
how much farther I must travel.
I have not come all this country
alone for nothing.

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Buffalo

is our probably Polish
narrative wherein
rags are set in stone,
rats scuttle on the docks,
the wings of bats make wry
wheels above the gantries.
We eat white bread, buttered.
The shy gray sky races
over the gold bank bowl-dome
gone green with zealous use.
We have tarted downtown
up with Modern
but the place dies
still at night.
My friend Plotinski says
our name has nothing
to do with the animal
on the nickel that squealed
when squeezed too hard
by schoolchildren practicing
that upwardstanding
nobility of the immigrants
to whom we owe
our waterfront, unsuspected
until they laid their dying
hands upon it.

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It is the usual spring.

A good spring for twigs.
Our besoms cleansweep anew
in our boulevards
made for wind and sand
and birds on straight-line maneuvers.
Sweeping, we keep one-eyed watch
on the crowd of men gathered
behind the shrieking woman at the corner,
that woman, the one
who holds her body sideways
when she crosses streets.

Not a menace to the public order:
The authorities are willing
to grant her that.
I myself have seen these words
stamped on her pass.
We others, keepers
of the city's hearths
and homes and funerary urns,

we sweep, we build cordilleras of sand
along the sides of the roads, we bury
the buds that have dropped from the trees,
the late birds that did not survive.
The wind blows chattering shreds of paper
against the backs of our legs.
We do not talk. We already know
how our spring will end:
our bodies swept broom-clean,
our souls picked dry.

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Electra Hissed at by a Swan

As if she sensed I was coming
from the room of my dying father

As if she smelled death in my clothes,
saw it in my walk

As if she knew I was
husbandless, childless,
dry, cold, sunk in myself,
dust-bag, bone-bag,
mother-hater,
not to be trusted near her young

As if she thought me befouled

As if my grief at father's dying
were not enough to redeem me

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Scott Cairns

Necropolitan

Not your ordinary ice cream, though the glaze
of these skeletal figures affects
the disposition of those grinning candies
one finds in Mexico, say, at the start of November,
though here, each face is troublingly familiar,
exhibits the style adopted just as one declines
any further style—nectar one sips just as he
draws his last, dispassionate breath, becomes
citizen of a less earnest electorate. One learns
in that city finally how to enjoy a confection,
even if a genuine taste for this circumstance
has yet to be acquired, even if it is oneself
whose sugars and oils now avail a composure
which promises never to end, nor to alter.

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Two Poems by Sarah Messer

Rendered Dog

I have held the man in my mouth
all day, trying to find a place
to bury him, dig him up later.
Mailboxes gape, trees fling
their arms in the air like bad actresses,
a child in a driveway unfolds
her palm like an anemone under
a wave, her face watery
above the training wheels.

Everywhere I walk, he is cat fur,
orange peel beneath my tongue: a tincture
of needles, the taste of liver salving
the gray earth. Once, in a quarry, we
slathered silt beneath shirts, bodies
in the girth of plateau, morass
of limestone scapula, backs of flat rock.
We rolled our mud-flanks
across continents. A plane glazed
the dark monitor of sky, blinking red
heartbeat: *we are still alive*. I wondered
what it would be like to hold
the earth inside me, and worried
about being interred too early, lying naked
in mud, the simple sheath of seeds.

Yet technology impedes impulse, and this
is the industrial age. In the marketplace
flesh is sucked in airtight plastic, renamed
meat. Shoppers stare at my matted hair,
my swollen mouth, the crenelated edges

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of lip-flap billowing with each breath. My painted
toenails clack on the asphalt. They call me
bitch with a bad mouth. But I only
translate the man who trained me: *speak*,
fetch, and *come*. Once, everything owned
itself, and roots were dug out of meaning.
Now, even the dirt can be sold.

1898, Chittenden Hotel Suicide

Dear Nobody,
We are the hands she left—
three fingers wire-bound and strapped
to a board, photographed. We mute
what the mind could not forget: names,
what he once said—*can never be*
taken back.

We held the braided arm, poured
carbolic acid, braced the embroidered arm, a shredding
hotel chair, watched the ceiling arms
stare back like cracked lilies.
We once held a key made of hair, of needle turned twice
in the velour light of a hallway sprouting rooms,
once knew
door lacquer, the places skin digs in,
how to rip a suitcase full of paper.

What she gave us:
tight grip of pen,
her mouth, a perch on the dip
of throat.
What she wrote: unspeakable. The collection of used things,
other people's wedding rings, bird-women
with the claws of beasts—*to be arms chained*

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to the headboard, *to be arms above the earth*,
to have a decent burial, leaving
the prescriptive purse of money.
We are the hands they read: Head line pairing
Life, the mount of Moon, Venus girdle, the second
phalanx of Saturn's finger long with insanity,
the necessary condition for the act, according
to chirognomy volumes.
In the morgue ten days—
transpierced, *evaporated woman*, *not a trace*, *not a tooth*
punctuating strewn carpets—newspapers printed
our palms instead: striated shells, bleached wood,
tiny whorls drawn up and down the shrinking tips, each
a hooded head in the flash, shadow, flash—as if
a mother or lover could claim imprinted, indelible flesh,
the route she burned, shipwrecked—
all the evidence we knew.

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Two Poems by Charles Tomlinson

The Shadow

The sun flung out at the foot of the tree
A perfect shadow on snow: we found that we
Were suddenly walking through this replica,
The arteries of this map of winter
Offering a hundred pathways up the hill
Too intricate to follow. We stood still
Among the complications of summit branches
Of a mid-field tree far from all other trees.
Or was it roots were opening through the white
An underworld thoroughfare towards daylight?
There stretched the silence of that dark frontier,
Ignoring the stir of the branches where
A wind was disturbing their quiet and
Rippled the floating shadow without sound
Like a current from beneath, as we strode through
And on into a world of untrodden snow,
The shadow all at once gone out as the sun withdrew.

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Melville on the Acropolis

Not magnitude, not lavishness
But form, the site.
—Herman Melville

He scanned the hill-top temple and the spread
Horizon of both ocean and of land
With a sailor's eye. Not the dark
Flux of unending sea—the form
Was Doric and the site lay clear,
The whole of distance swung in a single arc.
The temple was the containing vantage, he
The temple's eye left hungry by the sea:
Here, depth rode steady, distances
Must answer to the pull and measure
Of the ruined, sunlit colonnade that still
Culminated the upward forces of its hill.
The form, the site: one held in the other's bowl—
Stone against space, space opening onto mountain—
And the mariner balanced precariously whole
On this stone ship headed towards Hymettos.

for Vincent Scully

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Alfred Kazin

Jews

From the Journals of a Lifetime

(1938–1945)

Before Asya and I were married, we decided to keep a daily record of our lives. Of course we won't keep it up. I do need a notebook-journal-record of some sort, and this may be it. Asya is like nothing I ever anticipated or even hoped for. She's priceless.

"They will more than arrive there, every one."

• • •

A Sunday afternoon walk to the river with Asya. In this industrial kitchen of Long Island City, where the factories lie scrubbed and waiting in the sun like so many pots and pans hung up to dry, there is a weariness in the air. The river is not the sluice of New York harbor it usually is, but a pallid

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turgid stream breaking weakly against neglected docks and piers and river dumps.

Sunday: the fog over the river and the long line of yellow lamps all along the subway line near the "project," where Italians live in modern-art slums, cut and parcelled like cheap dresses in a factory. The Italians play an old game with a few balls and a hole in the ground. It just needs a little earth, a wall, a gutter for us to play a game!

I remember the sadness of Sunday because I was so terrified of school the next day—the waiting, the fear before the soul returns to its treadmill, the fear of stammering in class the next day as my mother stammered when she was afraid. And when was she not afraid, even as she passed the fear on to me? She could not speak my English, and I hated falling into her Yiddish, it was so broken with her fear, her grief over everything she had left full of dark Poland, Jew-hating Poland. Even when there was no school I wanted not to leave the sand at Coney Island as the beach emptied and I could still look to another world in the water.

Sunday: the walk to Highland Park out of Brownsville and East New York, out of everything I knew to the wonderful line of yellow lamps across the embankment before the park—the dumped earth we used to climb over to the playing grounds, where the boys played a last game of touch football in the twilight, and we would sit on the benches near the reservoir, petting so madly as the lights of the YMCA spread out before us, challenging us, that I came, astonished to ecstasy by the weights in my body falling from tier to tier.

Sunday: playing Bach duets with Anne, my partner in the violin section of the Franklin K. Lane High School orchestra. Then her mother's Polish cups of tea. The sharp reproving taste of lemon in my mouth as we go over French irregular verbs for tomorrow. Sunday: Highland Park and the reservoir around which my teacher Julian Aaronson and I walked, dis-

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secting the first stories I wrote in high school. Sunday: always Highland Park and the trees in shadow, the flower garden we could barely see in the growing dark. Darkness, the darkness! And then the walk through the Italian neighborhood to home—the butcher shops busy of a Jewish Sunday—the push-carts lining Belmont Avenue, Cousin Sophie's old room with a bed and a table for me to write on and the fragrance of Sophie still where she had kept her dresses behind a curtain, forever bring her back. And sitting there, looking out on Sutter Avenue and thinking Israel! Israel! Why have you forsaken me! Sunday: the long remembered waiting and then Nancy's rhinestone dress as we huddled together against the wall of the toilet, hoping her parents would not return too soon. Sunday: the waiting, the waiting for the next day, the benches in Highland Park, the cold, the kitchen sink, the water in the reservoir.

• • •

Every once in a while some token—a sentence in a book, a voice heard, will recall for me the fresh instant delight in American landscape and culture that I felt when I really got into *On Native Grounds*. The sentence this morning, fresh as a spring wind, comes from Constance Rourke's book on Audubon, on the sudden realization that his ornithology showed a national sense of scale, that like Whitman he was a great voice of American nationality.

I recall the excitement under which I lived for weeks in 1939, when I knew that I had this passionate and even technical interest in images of the American past. Thomas Eakins, always a hero to my spirit. I would walk up and down the "American" rooms of the Metropolitan Museum taking in the portraits of solemn Colonial and Revolutionary figures—dull glazed transcriptions of a Sunday morning in ye olde Flatbush 1836. Images that brought back the delight I had taken even as a boy in old narratives of American discovery, the indomitable Henry Hudson always at the center—in life stories of Ameri-

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cans at all times and in all conditions. As a college student during the depression, one of my jobs for the National Youth Administration ($15 a month) was to comb the *Dictionary of American Biography* for southerners who had graduated from college before the Civil War. I never got tired of reading their stories. I have never been able to express the excitement I get from "Americana," from Constance Rourke's saying "the poet of American nationality"—from the very names Cope, James, Peirce, Dickinson, Roebling in Lewis Mumford's *The Brown Decades*—from Thomas Beer's *Hanna* and *The Mauve Decade*—from the letters of William James. To think of Albert Pinkham Ryder and Henry James, of Emerson and Whitman and Dickinson in the same breath, as it were, gives me extraordinary satisfaction. Makers and movers and thinkers—observers in the profoundest sense. I loved to think of America as an idea, to remember the adventure and the purity, the heroism and the *salt*.

Of course I love all this from the outside, as the first native son after so many generations of mudflat Russian Jews who never saw America. But my personal need is great, my inquiry is urgent.

• • •

His name is Howard Nott Doughty, and he comes from a family so long settled in Ipswich, Massachusetts that they are still in touch with their English cousins. They don't, it seems, quite approve of these cousins across the sea, who are so backward in the way of our advanced American ways that in sending over some silver spoons as a wedding present, they neglected to add the bride's initials to the groom's.

At Harvard in the twenties (he was born in 1904), he was with Lincoln Kirstein and Varian Fry, one of those advanced undergraduates who put out *Hound & horn*, that great founding journal of American modernism. Tall, rangy, languidly humorous about his descent in the world, he is still the proud Yankee and is writing a biography of his distant kinsman

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Francis Parkman. He is so glad to meet up with another literary bloke in dreary Long Island City that he has taken to presenting me with rare editions inscribed to me in French—*Moby-Dick* illustrated by Rockwell Kent and Madame de La Fayette's beautiful little seventeenth-century novel, *La Princesse de Clèves*, the story of the exquisite heroine's overcoming the temptation to illicit passion.

The question about this Yankee patrician and kindly friend is what is he doing in Long Island City? He is teaching at the Police Academy! Why he is fallen this low is a question around which he genially circles without ever telling me anything. Until the other day, when he said, as if exasperated, "Of course you know I'm homosexual." Of course I hadn't known any such thing, and probably exasperated him even more by having nothing whatever to say on the subject.

He is married, with a daughter, and is regularly unwell. He suffers such spasms from colitis, which he offhandedly describes as "a stress disease," that he frequently doubles up as he is talking to me. What interests me is his stoical sense of failure, his clearly having a "failing," as his ancestors might have said.

He is interested in me because of my book, but my being a Jew seems to be a problem to him. His feisty little wife Binx laughs in a knowing way as she makes "jokes" about Jews. These pass over me like air, since despite her malice on the subject, I never quite know what she is talking about. In his turn, Howard seems to feel that my being a Jew is a terrible loss to me. This bothers him a lot. The other day, assuming for no reason that I observe the dietary laws, he came by not only with his usual gift of a book but with a bag of oysters that he carefully shucked and cleaned, then to my amazement hotly demanded that I eat them right then and there.

• • •

Thinking of John Dewey this morning. Some weeks ago, as I was walking to the subway after my day at the Forty-second

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Street library, I saw Dewey on Lexington Avenue with a woman I took to be his daughter. I looked at him with affection and pleasure that I had recognized him. He stared back. After half a block I looked back. He was still staring, talking to his daughter as if to say, "Now, when did I have him in my classes?"

I was thinking of Dewey because my impression of his career and significance is different from that of students of his philosophy alone. For me Dewey represents more than the pragmatic adaptable twentieth-century intelligence that was going to fit philosophy to the scientific age. He really speaks with the security and serenity of a vanished world. I think not of his lack of elegance, the clumsy handiwork of his style, but of his nobility, his steadiness, the work of immense quiet usefulness, the moral achievement that constitutes his life.

• • •

Passing under our kitchen window on my way home from the subway at Borough Hall, I loved to look up at Asya standing in the window in the last light, preparing our evening meal. And then all the ease and charm of our young marriage would unfold for me, right there on Clinton Street, before I got to our front door on Remsen.

Brooklyn Heights, 1938: the downtown streets dense with traffic for Brooklyn Bridge on a winter's day, and lined with churches, banks, courts, municipal offices, stationers, the old Brooklyn central library on Montague Street, the main offices of Brooklyn Union Gas, the one big street clock in the neighborhood, lawyers on Court Street hungrily bunched together but looking to grab any passerby who could be turned into a client. The air was resonant with bailiffs, city marshals, lined legal paper foolscap size. But in the center of the center, one room and a kitchen, fifty a month, we had our love.

The minute I left the house for the Forty-second Street library and my excited all-day reading in American writers for

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my first book, I could feel in an instant flush of delight how that grid of dark radiating lines, offices, marble bank fronts, subway openings, the elevated on Fulton Street and the trolleys for the bridge—how all that dark, busily official and endless hum of topmost Brooklyn life—enclosed us, enclosed us tight. So that at night, as we lay on our just-made-up sofa bed listening to a Haydn cello concerto on WQXR against the fits and starts of city traffic, we had a delicious sense of being alone and all to ourselves on one sluggishly turning flywheel of the city. In the sudden stillness of a Sunday night, one shining cross in the venerable church across the street (Brooklyn, the city of churches) burned at our windows.

None of that belonged to us—not the documents being turned over all day, not the proprietary New England airs Brooklyn Heights still gave itself as we walked down Remsen Street to the harbor against a solid line of classic brownstones. Beautiful wooden doors with exquisitely etched glass inserts. At night, you could often see the hall light, and even the curve of the stairs as they mounted. Another world, another world! I could write about the mansion dominating Columbia Heights that figured in Ernest Poole's *The Harbor* (or so I guessed), but I could not imagine myself in it.

All this before the Esplanade. At the end of Remsen Street, however, you could wedge through the fence to face the great jeweled breast of Manhattan floating on the water. Now everything was ours—the cobblestones leading down to the piers under the old "Japanese" iron bridge at the end of Montague Street, the iron-doored warehouses, the freighters tied up below with one small light in the rigging, and, out there to the right, above all and mastering all, the great Brooklyn Bridge itself. Everything on Columbia Heights was related for me to the bridge's hard leaping and thrusting glory. The immigrant John Roebling had dreamed it; the immigrant's son Washington had built it after the dreamer was struck by the Fulton Street ferry the bridge was going to replace. And here, right on Columbia Heights, Hart Crane had written the only lines that could match John Roebling's dream:

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O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry—

• • •

We were radicals; our friends Richard and Felice Hofstadter on one side of Montague Street, Richard and Eleanor Rovere, Bertram D. Wolfe and his wife, Ella, on the other. The depression lasted until the war, Hitler was on our heads day and night, Franco was killing his own people with the help of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. It was inconceivable that anyone intelligent and of good will was not on our side, along with Auden, Malraux, Silone, Orwell, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Wilson, Farrell and every young writer, scholar, painter and medical student we knew. It was 1938. Thirteen men from City College—students, faculty, alumni—were to die in Spain.

At 68 Montague Street Bert Wolfe (an early leader of the American Communist Party, long since expelled as a Lovestoneite, a right deviationist) and his jolly wife covered a wall with photographs of their old comrades and friends from many countries in (O holy word) the "movement." The central photograph was of Lenin, looking (it seemed to me) at all the others with his usual disapproval of anyone not up to his harsh standards. There was also a lot of Mexico on the wall. The Wolfes had been close to Diego Rivera (whose life he was writing when he was not writing *Three Who Made a Revolution*) and his stormy painter-wife Frida Kahlo.

Bert and Ella of course ended up, like so many other exhausted radicals and neo-cons, at the Hoover Institution in Palo Alto. Bert died there. Forty years later, when I was at Stanford's Center for Advanced Studies, I was happy to see

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Ella, as delightful as ever, but was not prepared to see in Palo Alto the same lineup of photographs I had seen forty years before at 68 Montague Street. Lenin still looked disapprovingly at everyone else. Living amid the Hoover Institution's remarkable collection of documents relating to the international Communist movement, Ella was more awash than ever in her old history. Just as she had joked in 1938 that a Comintern congress had no delegate from the jungle because "they couldn't find a Jew willing to wear a nose ring," so now she laughingly reported Trotsky's affair with Frida Kahlo and of how she had given him up as "that tiresome old man."

• • •

The thirties were an age of faith, for a time, and a great many people I knew and knew of were soldiers of faith. We alone were pure. The only evil in the world was Fascism. That took care of all other things, like our personal lives.

I came home from the library one afternoon, radiantly happy, to find Asya face down on the floor, sobbing in anger, uselessly hitting the floor with her fists. The excessive smell of fresh paint in the newly occupied flat hit me as I bent to her. She had just had a visit from her mother, whose only way of dealing with a charmingly errant husband was to harangue Asya to the point of hysteria.

Her parents were Jews who proudly let me know that they considered themselves Russian "intelligentsia" and condescended to my easily subdued parents because they spoke Yiddish to each other. There was not a thing about the U.S.S.R. that Asya's parents did not declare holy, perfect and adorable. The mother amused me—only her pretensions were amusing—by wearing severe suits and routinely choosing a straight kitchen chair to sit in with a fixed frown—I never saw her smile—rather than the wing chair that was our one luxury. This showed her contempt for "bourgeois" frippery. Otherwise she was an absolute terror, always on the attack. She just could

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not manage her husband. Often enough she could not even locate him.

Everything about Asya's parents was strange to me. The mother's cruelty to her children—Asya had a younger brother who was to succumb at an early age to the unbearable stress his mother dumped on him—went hand in hand with an idolatry of Stalin that made me laugh. Asya's father and I were fond of each other; he even confided that his terrible wife had a sexual hold on him that explained his inability to tear himself away from her. He loved his daughter madly and loved me even when, like my friend Richard Hofstadter, I jeered at such political orthodoxy.

• • •

The Hofstadters were another left-wing couple in marital disarray, but here the problem was startlingly, openly one of rival careers. The unstoppable Felice (only cancer would stop her at twenty-nine after she had borne a son she typically named Dan after "the smallest and most belligerent tribe in Israel") had come down from a prominent medical family in Buffalo as if she expected New York to fall at her feet. And it damned near did. At first the Hofstadters in their rough lodgings over a bakery on Montague Street were so poor that Felice seriously tried to get Dick work in a nightclub as a stand-up comic. We all howled when he did his imitation of FDR and of the Ozark farmer whose daughter had fallen into the well. "Must get her out of there one of these days."

Before long Felice, starting only as a researcher for the medical columnist on *Time*, was writing the medical column. Women had traditionally been restricted to research for writers exclusively male. But of course Felice broke through all that. She was irresistible in her ability not only to accept and affirm but to *display* her various loyalties. Only robustly left-wing Felice could have decided on living so close to the harbor so that she could keep up with members of the Norwegian Seamen's Union. They would wander in of a Saturday after-

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noon for a taste of Felice's famous *cholent*, the Sabbath dish prepared by Orthodox Jews before the Sabbath, when no cooking is allowed.

Felice publicly loved being Jewish, as she publicly flourished feeding her "comrade" Norwegian seamen, shining to advantage as one of the first women writers on *Time*. When she left her office high up in the Chrysler Building of a Saturday night (working the weekend "for Luce" was routine), she never seemed surprised to be greeted by the many male friends waiting to take her out for dinner. She carried in every step the pride, the gusto, and for me the very romance that comes with sudden success for the young in New York, and which from that time forward remains embodied for me in the Chrysler Building itself, rising up there over Forty-second Street like the only true New York cathedral, its shining spire scraping the sky all right and challenging it to find another so confident in its potency and silver beauty. And this in the midst of a depression, weighing down millions, a whole quarter of the American working class unemployed, that aroused all Felice's scorn and indignation as a radical.

After uneasily trying this and that, Dick was in graduate school at Columbia and began writing *Social Darwinism in American Thought* as I was lurching into *On Native Grounds*. We were soon doing our reading side by side in the great Reading Room 315 of the Forty-second Street library. He was never an outspoken and public personality like his wife—not even when he was recognized as one of the most significant contemporary American historians. But not uninfluenced by his early Marxism, he had attained an intellectual certainty that won me, along with the gift for mimicry he displayed in private. The mimicry—of all possible American characters but always returning to that central presence, the President of the United States, who in our eyes was just not doing enough—was the voice of his essential skepticism. His German-background Lutheran mother had died early, his Polish-Jewish father had given his gift for Yiddish an irresistible turn. Between two such worlds—who would have guessed that the middle name

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of this former Lutheran altar boy was *Irving?*—he had become the amused outsider who looked Gentile, was married to a Jew and whose friends were regularly Jews.

I was linked to Richard Hofstadter by our passion for America as history. America was more than the radical alienation, the critical edge we brought to it. When Dick read aloud from Mencken's unforgettable portrait of William Jennings Bryan at the Scopes trial in Tennessee, when he laughingly quoted Mr. Dooley on Theodore Roosevelt's looking all teeth—"Teddy bit his way to the platform"—I would sit back in an ecstasy of enjoyment that someone else equally relished every little bit of the American scene. Dick would say of Columbia University that he loved observing it as "a society." In the same way I was fascinated by the depression crowds jostling us in Room 315 as we did our reading, the mass of impatient, often clearly troubled unemployed people in the Automat across the street on Forty-second Street where we often gobbled our lunch at the stand-up table before going off to a local pool parlor to play Ping-Pong. We had left our books and notes on one of the golden library tables under a note—BACK SOON. PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB.

All the while Dick was quietly preparing himself for the great career that was to end all too soon in 1970 of leukemia. Felice was growing more restive. I was not prepared to understand—not until it cut my own life in half—the urgency of rebellion that erupted in the Hofstadters' public quarrels over the way she drove their new car. Their increasingly prosperous and fashionable lifestyle made the Hofstadters as a couple less fun than they had been in their old Bohemian lodgings in Brooklyn Heights. Felice loved being important to *Time* more than she could ever love *Time itself.* Writing up a frightful industrial accident in which a worker had been pressed to death by a machine, she had thought it clever to write that the victim could now be slipped under a door. On her way home she felt horrified by her callousness, rushed back to the office to change the piece and found the managing editor roundly congratulating her.

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Felice was ambitious, morally sensitive to a degree, but she was not as serious as she thought, not a serious thinker like her husband. She wanted to be a novelist, she wanted to be acclaimed, she wanted, she wanted! When I could not respond as expected to her one published novel, of intense social content, the roof fell in. I never saw her again. As the war was ending, she became deadly ill. Dick, looking after her, sitting by her side in a darkened room, began *The American Political Tradition* in the dark, on a yellow pad, not always able to see his words.

• • •

I began *On Native Grounds* in 1938 with the instinct that I should ground my book in the crucial last decades of the nineteenth century that saw moralism as the residue of genuine religious belief derided by "scientific" determinism and the ever-mounting tide of American power since the Civil War confronting a violently aroused social discontent among farmers and the immigrant working class.

The nineteenth century did not seem at all far away to me sitting in the Forty-second Street library surrounded, as it were, by *The Education of Henry Adams*, Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Gustavus Myers's *History of the Great American Fortunes*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Mark Twain's "The United States of Lyncherdom," Jane Addams's *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Abraham Cahan's *Rise of David Levinsky*. My Russian immigrant parents, born in the 1880s, represented the period to me as did my old Brooklyn neighborhood, with its tenements, its clotheslines hanging out of windows, its synagogues in the midst of street after street given over to radical protest, its peddlers and their horses collapsing in the street and dying before my eyes of a hot summer morning.

The harshly combative end of the nineteenth century in America naturally drew me; it was all still going on. I really did not believe that the "socialism" of so many intellectuals

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I knew would change anything. I could not imagine what this much-promised total change could be. The purge trials just then going on in Russia were a shock and a warning long before the Nazi-Soviet pact left me gasping. Stalin was as great a murderer as Hitler. But the radicalism of the period was a perspective. We were intellectually armed. To know that we were good because we were on the side of history added to the world-historical sense of purpose with which I was writing my book, though the subject was only America. The age was with me, the excitement of the thirties was in my book and was getting me to write it—along with my being twenty-three and lusting for everything in sight.

So at first it did not matter when the book was published—in the midst of the war—and the wildest hopes were amazingly realized. After four years of trudging to the library, teaching evenings at City College (for $2.50 an hour), I spent my days at Madison and Forty-ninth as literary editor of *The New Republic*. Asya and I were now at Twenty-fourth and Lexington. I was exhilarated, feeling myself at the center of things in midtown, meeting writers—Saul Bellow just in from Chicago, his old schoolmate Isaac Rosenfeld, the Italian-Jewish exile from Rome Paolo Milano, William Barrett. I was excited by the whirl of New York and the high lean towers of Radio City, excited even more by the women in the morning light, the proud, beautiful women of New York, the breasts and hot purple mouths of the Bergdorf women, the fantastic sexiness of New York at lunch in certain cool restaurants—all of it hot and cold at once, frightening to dream about. But I dreamed continually, was ashamed, but not so ashamed that I did not go on dreaming and wanting.

• • •

What is it men in women do require?
The lineaments of gratified desire.
What is it women in men do require?
The lineaments of gratified desire.

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This morning on Second Avenue near the Queensboro Bridge I waited for the bus in front of a fruit stand. The fruits and vegetables out under the awning, still dripping with water from the can, suddenly aroused in me by their look of careless richness a whole world of memories about the summers in Brownsville when I was a kid. The early summers, when I was either too young or we were too poor for me to go anywhere. The hot afternoon and the tenement women sitting out front on kitchen chairs. And then that moment that made summer, the unbelievable moment of pause, when Mama would confess (after hours at the sewing machine), "Oh, it's so hot, *too* hot!" And I would walk down to P.S. 66, where the other kids gathered to play in the cool basketball sweat of the hall downstairs.

The fruits on the stand, the bowling on the cool brown floor in the dust, Mama in her eternal housedress. Why is this dim memory suddenly dear to me? Looking back is opening myself to everything out of childhood I've wanted desperately to lose.

Lord, come out of the wilderness!

• • •

In Durham, N.C. a week ago I saw a white boy throw a lighted cigarette right at a Negro soldier, hoping it would burn his hair. Bob Wunsch of Black Mountain College told me that when he was a boy studying at the family table an uncle came in and threw something across that left a red splotch. It was the finger of a Negro the uncle had just helped to lynch. The education of a southerner. Wunsch now wants to admit Negroes to the college, and spends much of his time in Negro schools.

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They are killing us off in Europe. They are killing us by the thousands from the Rhine to the Volga. The blood of the Jews is like the vapor in air that Faustus saw when the Devil claimed his due. But no one claims us but death. Our due is the "sympathy" of a few men of goodwill. From this morning's *Times* I learn that a few French Catholic priests have been opposing Vichy's submission to Nazi Jewish policy. Saliège, the Archbishop of Toulouse, has written this pastoral letter: "There is a Christian morality, there is a human morality that imposes duties and confers rights. These duties and these rights derive from the very nature of man. They may not be violated. No mortal may endeavor to suppress them. That children, women, men, fathers, mothers should be treated as a wretched herd, that members of the same family should be separated from one another and embarked for unknown destinations, was a spectacle reserved for our bad times to see. Why does the right of asylum no longer exist in our churches? Why are we a vanquished people? Lord, have mercy on us! Our Lady, pray for us! These Jews are men, these Jewesses are women; these aliens are men and women. All is not permissible against them. Against these men and women, against these fathers and mothers. They belong to mankind. They are our brethren as are so many others. No Christian can forget that.

"France, beloved motherland; France, who preserves in the conscience of all children traditional respect for the individual; chivalrous and generous France, I do not doubt that thou are not responsible for these errors."

• • •

Croton. Sitting in this screened-in porch is like occupying a mound in the forest. The fixed, monotonous cries of the birds, as if in pain. Nobody told us when Asya and I rented this cottage that in this area Stalin is still God. And that "gangster, that enemy of the people" Max Eastman is still

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playing daily tennis at the other end! As I was working, a woman came up to the porch and stared at me bitterly. "Aren't you coming to the meeting?" "What meeting?" She looked as if she couldn't believe my response and stormed off in disgust.

• • •

The sidewalk preachers in New York on Sunday afternoons. There is nothing so empty as walking alone in New York on Sunday. The gutters seem to throw back all one's thoughts. The pavements are creased and dull. All that life, which has been flung out here all week, only to reach a point in a schedule, has now been emptied into great boxes and thrown away. The storefronts are glass; the walkways are glass; the sky, which before might have gone unnoticed in its beauty is now just too remote. Life has dissolved, been dusted away into the corners of endless carpets. Stray men are waiting for buses, or breathing in the litter of chewing gum wrappers and subway latrines down below, where the trains make such a roar when they come. Or they are gathered in hostile congregations in the Bowery, at the entrances to parks, near bridges, listening to the funny men who are crying to Jesus on a New York Sunday. Once I saw a man talking to himself in the shadows of the el's pillars and the newsstands at the entrance to Brooklyn Bridge, crying with genial desperation that Jesus saves. They write their lessons for the day in chalk on the sidewalk, mount a box, and shout, though there may be no one there. At most they draw a handful—boys and girls on a Sunday outing; people looking for the subway; the Bowery women in dirty fur collars and Queen Mary hats who live nowhere and everywhere. And the city tramps, the fuzzie-wuzzies of New York's self-disgust. The preachers look like small-town insurance agents; some still wear the high collar of 1912. Their faces are content; their hearts are full of belief. Who are they? The amateurs of the faith, slaves to the office all week and missionaries to Sin City on Sunday? If they are believers, why do they look so pleased with themselves? If they are fakes, why are they so

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serene? They are not fakes. They have enough religion to talk to anyone who will listen on a Sunday afternoon. It does not matter that I will not listen, that you will scoff, that little boys will laugh and run away. They have divested themselves of the obligation to be someone else. What I see most in them—refugees from the slave week. They are preaching not to convert but to express themselves, to be themselves, for once, on the empty glass-walk Sundays; in the shadows and in the Sunday latrine stench. To be free, where everyone is absent.

• • •

I joined *Fortune* so that I could get overseas. So now I am on my way to Great Lakes Naval Training Station. First week Washington, second week Camp Lee in Virginia and Bainbridge in Maryland, a white plume of smoke over the brown crusted earth in Ohio. Red barns. Earth looks cold and scrubbed between the bales of straw wheat, villages that make me think of Senator Bricker, they are so stately, proper looking. All night long, bouncing in the upper berth of car 73. Where am I going? Where? Yet it is a happy day for all my terror—a good Sunday morning. I am full with love for Mary Lou, expectant of love. But no one for a while, please. No more company, thinking, friends for a while. I have committed a sin and now want to be alone. I feel no easy pain—all this was committed in my mind long before she came down to the hotel in Washington.

Madison, Wisconsin. These beautiful lakes and the hill at the university. The sunlight. I sat near the lake all this morning, thinking, thinking.

• • •

Paolo Milano is right—I am infatuated, hate it and hate myself. But yes, I am going through with Mary Lou. I am going through—I mean to see the final edge of the woods.

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Where is the meaning that is supposed to flow out of love? Asya is going away. There is a crack in me that I do not want to heal.

Countess Tolstoy comments in her diary on her husband: "A gifted man puts all his understanding and all the subtlety of his soul into his works, while his attitude to real life is dull and indifferent. It is the same with my husband, who is infinitely more gifted than Taneyev. What a wonderful understanding of human psychology there is in his books, and what an extraordinary indifference and lack of understanding in his home life. He neither knows nor understands me, or his children, or any of his friends."

• • •

"Neue Liebe, Neues Leben."
—Goethe

• • •

Living in a miserable room on University Place, The Hotel Albert. I heard once that the hotel was owned by the painter Albert Ryder's brother, who named it after him. Perhaps this is why I let myself come here. But the spirit of Albert Pinkham Ryder is not here now. I pray for a little rest here, and want to be quietly alone, so glad to be out of Isaac Rosenfeld's apartment in Barrow Street, when I lived there with Mary Lou. How much darkness is associated for me with those rooms and Isaac's crude orgone box, in which he sat like a man waiting in a telephone booth for someone to call him back. Endless processions of dirt that disappeared from one corner only to find new shape in another. Isaac the village philosopher. His special gift for humiliating himself and the world of nothing but ideas he lives in. It is unpleasant to rent from your friends, to argue about money, to lend them money as if to stop their

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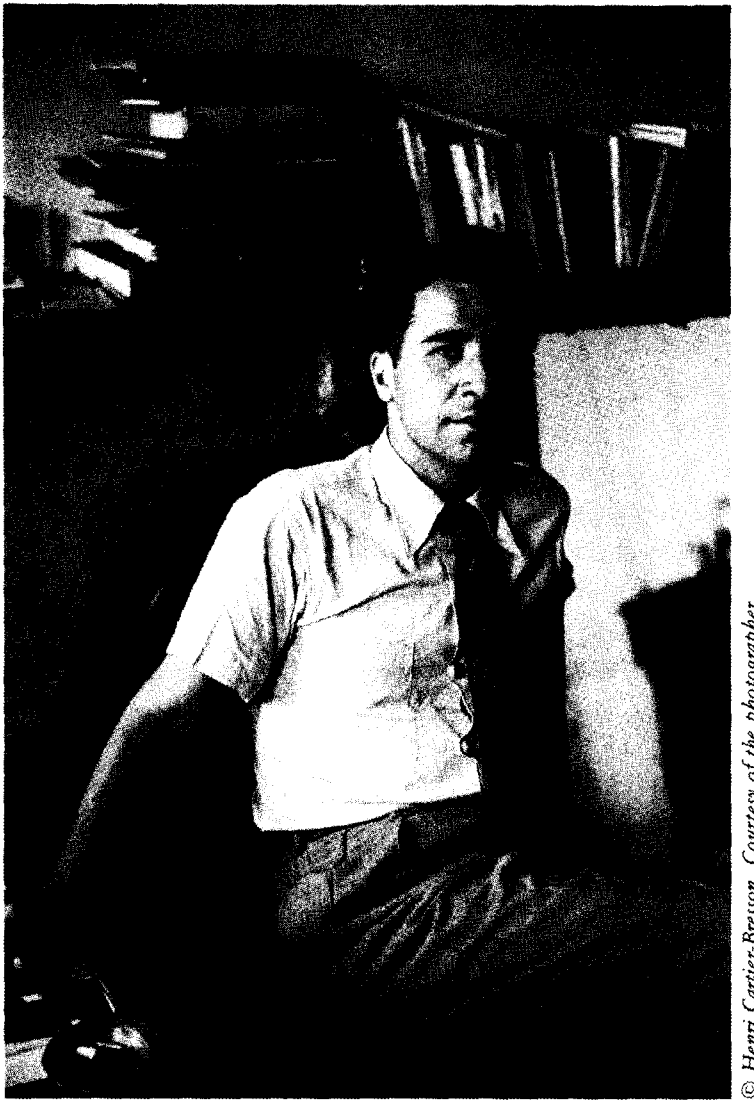

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mouths about the lovesick ass you have become in their eyes. Which they have no thought of repaying. Unpleasant to learn so much about them from the objects they have indifferently handled—not knowing that the friend will come to live there only because he has gone gaga and has nowhere else to turn.

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Swann—"What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which so far does not exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day."

• • •

The Allies have landed in France, and I am in Pasadena, California working on Blake for the Viking Portable and writing on Dreiser! I feel sick with shame, useless and in total exile. Walking in the sun-drenched California streets on my way to the Huntington Library and its tinkle tinkle "noiseless" typewriters, I confront the nothingness of my life here. The overbearing rich houses on every side of me, the solemn little academic specialists, each full of his "field" (sometimes called "my area"), the total void in which I live here. Thinking of tormented Mama and all the ghosts with which I wrestle, I cannot thrill to the Shakespeare Garden and my first taste of avocado. I was accompanied by an armed guard when I went downstairs at the Huntington to study the magnificent original of *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience*. The guard kept his hand on his holster all the time I was turning the pages in awe.

• • •

A wonderful dream scene in something that actually happened a few minutes ago. I found out only after it had begun that a concert of recorded music was being given in the Dabney Hall of the Cal Tech campus here, the first number being Beethoven's Ninth. I rushed over, but on entering the hall found it dark and could see nothing but the backs of chairs with figures in them. Beethoven's Ninth roared on and on over the weird silence of these figures so stiff in their chairs.

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There was no place to sit down, no one to join. They would have nothing to do with me, sitting with their backs to me, silently sitting in judgment.

Went down to Hollywood. The Group Theater people are all here, enjoying newfound prosperity. Clifford Odets was sitting in his flagstoned patio with the twinkly Irish actor Barry Fitzgerald, listening with rapture to a new recording of Brahms's Third and waving his glasses up and down as if he was conducting the music himself. In his emotion he let the glasses fall on the flagstones, where one lens cracked. When I wondered what he would do now he looked at me in surprise and said with a touch of pride, "Not to worry! I have four duplicates upstairs."

Dear Harold Clurman, always a favorite of mine, picked me up at my hotel and drove me to dinner at Musso and Frank's. I listened with so much interest to Harold's sardonic instructions in Hollywood protocol that it didn't occur to me to wonder why the drive was so short. Harold told me how important it was to the movie set to be seen driving a "really smart car" and to enter a restaurant wearing a very expensive-looking tie. A few nights later, taking a girl to dinner at Musso and Frank's, I discovered that the restaurant was exactly one block from my hotel.

Sylvia Sidney looked a little hungover when she opened the door. "So what brings you to California?" I explained that I was working on Blake at the Huntington Library. "Blake, huh?" "Hey Luther," she called to the next room, where her husband Luther Adler was playing cards. "Didn't we buy a print, something by this Blake guy, the other day?"

• • •

Provincetown; another bedroom. I had gone after Lou in Monhegan Island; useless, since I no longer know what I want. The only joy sitting around a battery-operated radio on a table lighted by a kerosene lamp was hearing of the liberation of Paris. In Boston went to Dixon Wecter's in Berkeley Street

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and to bed. Just before waking that morning early I dreamt of Paul Goodman. He was walking with me somewhere, suddenly stopped, and with a malicious smile said, "Well, shall I start asking you questions about Blake now?" I awoke with a shiver, felt the old familiar panic—a fog sweeping in on me from an unknown sea. I lay in bed unable to get up, when suddenly I thought to myself, No, no, it can't go on like this, I must fight it!

I left Boston yesterday afternoon and came into Provincetown last night. Why did I come back? Because I was looking for Asya as we had been here, 1940, in the cottage off Priscilla Alden Road rented to us by Varian Fry's English in-laws. Looking for our easy days together when after work on the book we went off to the great beaches at Race Point, Long Point, Highland Light in Truro. The great event was making our way over the dunes where Eugene O'Neill had lived for a season, and after him Edmund Wilson. At the end, the ocean, the Peaked Hill Coast Guard Station, the edge of the continent, the last of America. Nothing like Cape Cod, the farthest point out. There is nothing like reaching an end.

• • •

The tyranny of love in Proust fills all the spaces once occupied by custom, law, religion. It is the private man's last expression of his finiteness and longing for the infinite. The irony he sees in his own suffering, at once so great yet trivial in its self-absorption. How profound—Proust describing Paris bombed in the First World War, the background for Charlus chained to his bed in the male brothel. The last of the aristocracy "until the day when this willing Prometheus had had himself chained by force to the rock of pure matter."

• • •

Black Mountain, North Carolina. Went last night with some girls from the college and soldiers from the neighboring Moore

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Hospital to a "folk festival" in Asheville, a three-day running show. The emcee was a fat, friendly little man in a white suit. The crowd was cordial, a little baffled, in quest of excitement—answered at the high moments with the rebel yell. The "folk" dance was a jived square dance; stringed strumming; a seven-year-old boy propped up on a chair next to a microphone singing "God Bless America" in a timid whine. The only performance that had any ancient "folk" dignity was a spontaneous dance launched by an elderly man with the seamed look of a carpenter and an old black mustache who stepped out onto the wooden extension of the stage under the high blank light and tentatively, affectionately, tried out a few steps of his own. Then a man came out at the other end of the stage, duplicated and varied the steps of the first. The fact that he was wearing a dark city suit, collar and tie made his dancing all the more vivid. Then another man, and still another, until there was a ring of them, most of them dressed up like city people, business men, but each doing his steps quietly and absorbedly in his own corner. Homesick beyond repair, I remembered my uncles flashing out at a Jewish wedding to join other Jews dancing in a ring.

I walked the Asheville streets with Mary Schmitt, waiting for the bus to take us back. Saturday night in Asheville—the leaky neon colors; the banned liquor among the soda-pop bottles; the soldiers drunk to madness propped up in front of cigar stores and ice-cream parlors.

• • •

Went to bed early last night and had a violent dream in which all the data I've collected in my sessions with Dr. Janet Rioch came down to seeing my mother dead. It hurts to write this even here. I dreamt that Mama had fallen ill, somewhere in this region, and was being taken to the hospital on the top of an enormously elevated car or wagon. She lay there, the car heavily moving through the streets as if on parade. The scene was full of spectators! Suddenly she fell from a great

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height right into the street. My mother was dead. I was painfully, intolerably stirred; not so much from grief as surprise at such an event, surprise at my realizing (even in the dream) that I could accept this without horror.

My first impulse was to tell everyone within reach, to let it be known that Mama was dead. Entering a restaurant I encountered Clifton Fadiman and a stranger accompanying him. He was in Asheville on a lecture tour or something. He was indifferent in his general attitude, and when I told him about my mother, he and his friend smiled coldly, as if amused by my feelings, and went off.

• • •

Talk about exile! Black Mountain has lost whatever faculty it had. Eric Bentley, its stormy literary scholar, has departed for Fisk or something like—and depends on refugees who at the moment have nothing else. In painting, Josef Albers from Westphalia, with a Jewish wife. In music, the conductor Hans Jalowetz from Prague. In science, Dr. Erwin Strauss, a psychiatrist from Munich. He actually brought his heavy European armoire with him. I try to imagine it making its way from Munich, over oceans and mountains many.

I have one seminar in Blake, one in *Moby-Dick*, one in the Bible. I discovered that no one recognized any of the Old Testament references in the book.

All this for $15 a month and helping with the chores. Black Mountain is hobbled more by its lame ducks, as has been true of every American utopia, than by its poverty and the sentimentality about "community" and "liberation" in a pathetic defiance of traditional education. But it is bracing to live in this mountain setting, and I am so glad to be teaching again, Blake and Melville and Job!, that it seems right to do it for nothing.

Primitive magnificent country surrounds our pathetic idealism. The other day, walking in the back fields past the college, I stumbled on a chain gang. Tall hulking guard with rifle,

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prisoners all black, of course. Walking in the early morning cold to my two slices of bread and one strip of bacon (the bread economically buttered with a brush), the mists ribboning the mountains, is as heady as a dip naked in a mountain stream.

• • •

The fall lingered on, but now the cold has set in. The grass I walk to the dining room is frozen-white, shivery in early morning light and the mist from the river.

Received news from the Rockefeller Foundation that they can probably get me over to England by the first of the year to document the popular-education movement in the British armed forces and war factories.

Another letter from Bob Flint, Harvard's most assiduous recent intellectual, who loves to write me his reflections, letter after letter, straight from serving a flag admiral in the Pacific fleet.

"Every effort has been made to destroy the intangibles, but the fact remains that this war in the Pacific is one of the great explosions of pioneering energy in history, involving huge masses and breaking up the threads of social development like cobwebs in the grass. No one of us expects to return in less than two years, unless we have been wounded, and undoubtedly, we won't come back unchanged. Anything like a normal, predictable future seems like the remotest possibility."

• • •

Enormous walk to the state road and by the back road back to the college. Saw beautiful black horse let out of the stable circling wildly in the fields. Wonderful sight. Saw feisty Airedale with black snub nose tearing past me on the road. Looked like the busy bureaucrat, sniffing the scene in disapproval of every dog but himself.

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As you go down the main road, the houses you come to are on an incline, and so close to the path that it all looks like a tableau—Log-cabin. Oxen. Waterwheel. Plow. Farmers in ancient tattered straw hats.

• • •

Brooklyn to Liverpool on liberty ship George Westinghouse, in convoy of fifty-three vessels plus Canadian escort vessels. Four civilians wedged together in hospital room stacked with bedpans for the Army. One Franciscan to replace ailing Franciscan in Liverpool. One Baptist missionary to France. One radio engineer who sleeps all the time—Kazin.

Long straight lines of vessels in convoy make me think of ducks on parade—mother ahead, chicks plodding after her obediently but wavering out of line from time to time. If it gets too far out of line, it is in danger of being picked off. Second day stood watch with Ensign Petty, officer in charge of navy gunners on top bridge. Former math teacher in Liberty, New York, talked about how lonely it all is.

Ships in our line of the convoy, extreme right, went out of position during the night. Now we're last in our row again.

Bitter cold on bridge. Ocean the color of dirty iron. In Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* description of Cortés's journey into the interior. "It was August 16, 1519. During the first day their road lay through the *tierra caliente*, the beautiful land where they had so long been lingering; the land of the vanilla, cochineal, cacao . . . products which, indigenous to Mexico, had now become the luxuries of Europe; the land where the fruits and the flowers chase one another in unbroken circle through the year; *where the gales are loaded with perfumes till the senses ache at their sweetness*; and the groves are filled with many-colored birds, and insects whose enamelled wings glisten like diamonds in the bright sun of the Tropics."

Snow. Icy cold. Falling asleep in my bunk over every book. Time, like a broom, hangs over the dust of the days, to sweep it all away, and soon. Commodore of the convoy gives orders

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from a Dutch ship. Best thing in Prescott the portrait of Montezuma, who felt himself "rebuked by the superior genius of his foes."

Steward, of French-Canadian descent, never shuts up. Subject this morning the *fucking* British Empire. Our ever-present sense of danger—submarines, storms, collisions in the dead of night, bombings. No joke standing watch four hours at a time in this intense cold. General cynicism, but great individual pride in power material and military of the U.S.

Fair amount of damage from yesterday's storm. One ship in convoy drifting about in distress. Note of fatalism in old Aztec chieftains up against the Spaniards. Spaniards seemed "the great beings" whom the oracles had foretold. Aztec sense of historical inferiority *not* produced by the abstractions of Christian theology. The western hemisphere waited for the East to conquer it?

James Clark the chief mate was in a lifeboat for eight days in the Pacific until he was picked up. The third mate on the subject of Negroes and Jews: Negroes are prone to respiratory diseases because of the shape of their nostrils, which makes their breathing *different*. *All* Jews are used to a semi-tropical climate and become irritable when it rains.

Lifeboat No. 4 (*my* boat!), damaged badly. Men shift from boat to boat with each voyage, and are often strangers to each other the whole voyage.

As the heavy metal door to the ship's "library" suddenly opened and then smashed shut with a terrible bang, sleeping men jumped out of their bunks yelling that we were under attack. We are in the danger zone approaching the Irish Sea. One depth charge after another hurled overboard. Can read nothing but detective fiction, and as usual I am fascinated by the totally sexless, imperiously detached Buddha brain presented by Poe's Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, even ridiculous Nero Wolfe. Stooge Dr. Watson on godlike Sherlock—"It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind.

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He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen; but as a lover, he would have placed himself in a false position."

It is just this "saintliness" that puts us in awe of Sherlock, gives us our confidence in him. Only evil engages his interest. Like Hitler, but on our side.

At daybreak saw lights around dark water. English pilot at breakfast wolfing down bacon and eggs with a great smile. Cleared by 5:00 A.M., couldn't wait to see Liverpool, my first sight of Europe.

In these wretched much-bombed dock areas of Liverpool thought of Melville landing here a century ago for *his* first sight of Europe. Have never been able to forget the lacerating chapter in *Redburn* describing the indifference of Liverpool to the starving mother and baby in the narrow street of old warehouses. Or his patriotic enthusiasm at seeing so many emigrant ships setting out for America. "You can not spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world."

• • •

Drab painted signs along the docks: HANDS OFF GREECE. Clergyman in cafeteria, still looking entirely correct as he carefully shovels beans into himself off a knife. My first view of the most destroyed bombed areas. The astonishing delicacy and courtesy of the exhausted girls in the shops. In the train to London, corridors dripping water, a fashion buyer lady who travels all the time between London and Liverpool confronted me with "*your Negroes*." Wanted to know if because of their oppression they are allowed to pay less income tax than other Americans.

Lunch with Office of War Information people, agreed to consult, give talks on American writing. The streets full of whores, GIs milling around them. Lunch with sociologist, now a member of a royal commission on population, who was most charming in America but in England has nothing to say about

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us that is not poisonous. Wife a German refugee, rapturous over Soviet military government beginning to be set up in Germany. Such a fellow traveler, she burst out at me when I mentioned Stalin's murder of the Jewish Bund leaders Ehrlich and Alter.

Walked out of the blackout into Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*, overwhelming in its golden coloring after the hooded streets. Cutting and varnishing of the play to meet the present hour cleverly done. The audience laughed and applauded when Olivier shining in armor urged on his troops with "For England and St. George!" Then back into the cold and blanket darkness of the streets, leaving me homesick.

Food on everyone's mind. Sugar scarce, and when it comes, looks battered. Dirt on dishes. General subdued feeling that some big push is coming.

So many old gentlemen with wing collars. The style persists after the power is gone. General appearance of people better than I had anticipated, but so many shops boarded up. Protective shields of stone and piled-up sandbags in front of tube stations. Rosy looking children (they alone get orange juice and vitamins) playing in the cold dead twilight along the alleys. Low, massive palaces. Royal Academy rooms at Burlington House: chipped states. General feeling of grime, fatigue, but inner determination and cheerfulness.

Great question in my mind how they keep from hating us. A hotshot American pilot waving a long white ten-pound note like a scarf to get a taxi and when it rolled up was heard to say disdainfully, "What the hell can you do with a broken-down old flivver like that?" Indignant English girl: "*You* would either drink it or fuck it!"

GIs lined up by the dozens in Piccadilly Circus; always in front of American movies. I hear that on their tour five American senators were most anxious to be photographed with Bob Hope. One or two actually invited Hope to accompany them to 10 Downing Street. Ambassador Winant had to whisper in their ears that it isn't done.

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Uniforms, uniforms; all the English and Scottish regimental tabs. Privates in drab khaki buttoned up to the neck, while the officers look sleek and cool. Really quite grand-looking compared with our aggressive lawyer-turned-major types. I am propagandized to death by government press officers that there is more democracy in their army than was conceivable before the war, that it is possible to "rise from the ranks." But imagine an American officer saying to another, as I heard one British officer the other day say to another on a railway platform in the midlands, "Oh dear, I do hate to keep troops waiting." Americans feel superior only because we have *more*. Sailors in Chicken Coop restaurant deriding bare English diet. Hilarious sight of American lieutenants in tube blowing their bubble gum in unison.

Heard V-2 go off my first night, but tight restriction on all news of the V-2s. Searchlights endlessly combing the sky from or around Hyde Park. All American talk around me superficial—differences between Us and Them. In wartime the basic category in which people think politically, spiritually, emotionally, is the purely consensual notion of the Nation.

Thrilled to be walking the London Blake walked.

The fields from Islington to Marybone,
To Primrose Hill and Saint John's Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem's pillars stood.

Silence of streets at night eerie. Hard to tell if people have left all these blitzed-looking houses or still live in them.

The hill of subway sleepers on the platform of my tube station, Marble Arch. Old lady with glasses sliding down her nose perched on the highest bunk, and with her head way out of the bunk to catch what light was there to read by, reading the *Church Times*.

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The Circle (W.S. Maugham) at the Haymarket. The audience roared when Lord Porteous, red in the face, said—"the damned radicals can say what they like, but after all, a gentleman . . . damn it all, a gentleman is a gentleman." The play, circa 1912, a satiric comedy of manners, tinctured with Maugham's light cynicism and his easy pity—a pity that is Maugham's usual excuse for saying everything is just rot. Company openly laughed at the lines, as if the play with its once "amoral" conclusion had not already enjoyed the disintegration of the old order. Play now a costume piece.

Tour with OWI people. Touched briefly on the East End. The chauffeur, hired with his car for the occasion, quite a snob. When I pressed him to go on to Whitechapel, he explained there really wasn't much to see there—just "lower-class dwellings."

The Nazis went after the East End. Whole blocks of houses eliminated. What I saw was a dirtier, grimier, emptier, seemingly abandoned Lower East Side.

• • •

Lost my way on the subway and then on the bus trying to get "home" to the American billets on Great Cumberland Place. Overtaken by terrible depression. Went into a fog. Dinner at the billets and stayed for the movie. Lana Turner. How we all loved seeing our natural resources so generously displayed. Our homesickness could have been cut with a knife.

Rain pouring through the blackout made a beautiful London vignette. Over and again, walking about in the evenings, I have the misleading sensation looking at the completely blank-looking houses, that no one is living in them at all. Even in the daylight many houses look so battered and decayed that one supposes them vacant. The unbelievable emptiness

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makes me so much lonelier than I already am here that I want to yell "English! Where the hell are you all!" But the town is crowded.

The shortage of foods easy to get at home very acute, but what is available is distributed more equably. Three-week ration of chocolate 3/4 of a pound. A lot of eating on the run. Sandwiches and cakes eagerly bought in refreshment buffets at dinner. Communal kitchens a great comfort to the bombed out.

• • •

Harold Laski's open night for Americans at his bomb-damaged house on Addison Bridge Place. He is in evening dress, tassels on his evening dress slippers. I am surrounded by Americans in uniform, correspondents, folks from the embassy. In New York, 1939, I heard Laski address the Teachers' Union fervently on the necessity of socialism, and he is still at it. Profuse compliments on *On Native Grounds*, but nerve-racked me by name-dropping—"My old friend *Frank* Roosevelt!" and shocked me by saying he was a "realist" on Poland, must accept Russian demands, etc. I recognize the difficulty of the situation, but Laski is so cheerful about it all. Told us with feeling that he was awaiting a nephew of Justice Brandeis, now in England with a Justice Department team. The nephew, to Laski's intense chagrin, proved to be coldly unresponsive to Laski's florid praise of "my good friend the Justice."

Letter to the *New Statesman* complains that while the paper approves Churchill's offer of British citizenship to those Poles in their exile army who may not wish to return to Poland, Austrian and German refugees in the British army have not received such offers of citizenship. *They have been just allowed to adopt English surnames.*

The beauty of St James's Park at a twilight hour still soft with light. Walking across it to dinner at the Pep Club I was

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staggered by the scene—it bespoke another century, tranquillity and peace—made by the bridge and the palace at the far end of the water. But the night was horrible. Chambermaid told me this morning that the rockets sounded so close to her, she fainted while lying in bed. Twice now I have been awakened before daybreak by a vast hollow boom in the center of town. Oxford Street gets it again and again. Long line in front of shop that had all its windows knocked out. To pay tribute?

God, how hidebound they are in the smallest things while talking so grandly and even fiercely in Army and factory discussion groups about the "new Britain" after the war. Visceral conservatism of officers, indifference to Europe, paternalism not lacking in their mixed attitude toward their people. Pride in their holding out but impatient with troops for "softness toward the Germans"—for wanting to get out as soon as possible. Contempt for the Negro with us; for the "Oriental" with them. Was it Sterne who first said "Niggers begin at Calais"? At Army brain trust was informed "Semites write from right to left and *think* from right to left."

Where else in this world at war would I have had the bliss of hearing Kathleen Ferrier sing Handel and Gluck in a war factory to hundreds of workers joyously massed together at the lunch hour to hear her? Where else would I have been able to hear Myra Hess, bundled up against the cold, playing Schubert in the National Gallery divested of its pictures but massed with people, many of whom had waited an hour to get in, and only when they sat down had the chance to nibble at their little sandwiches? What a scene. What a people. And they *are* a people, solidly together to preserve their existence, in a way that moves me every time I find myself in the middle of them.

The "interior court" where the concert was held now as grimy and empty as all the great houses, museums, etc. But with that high regal look which the great squares keep even with their railings removed.

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In the evening after dinner the new double-daylight saving time gave us light, and Ruth Hooper and I walked to Waterloo from Park Lane—through the Green Park and St James's to Westminster and so onto the border of the East End. In this subtle light prolonged into the evening I saw London as I had not seen it before. Walking through the quiet and leafy park I felt that the light was renewing itself hour by hour.

• • •

Went down this Friday afternoon to the East End. In one section not blitzed the street is lined on both sides of an alley with houses dark, small and levelled together in a brown mass where nothing stands out of itself. I almost wept on seeing the street itself half-filled, every ten yards, with shelters that took up whatever air and space were there before. Tyne Place, Aldgate East—worse than New York's old East Side, and everything shuttled together by the bombings. . . . Scooped out squares are now storage tanks; only faint structural supports left. Bombed buildings make one arch after another you can see through. Liverpool Street station murkily beautiful this afternoon; half the old glass roof is out, as in so many London railway stations, and the light fiercely reflecting the hurrying crowds, the tea wagons and the dirt.

• • •

British officers do not take an oath to the King. They are his "friends," "looking after his troops."

They say speech in Britain changes every thirty miles. Commanding officer of Dorset regiment tells me most of his men still speak dialect.

First aid station, Walthamstow, London, running full blast despite bombing lull. People still serving twenty-four hours

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on, twenty-four off, hot-water bottles filled for shock cases. They miss the feeling of danger and of "being together."

"Adult education with us now the evangelism religion used to be." A long deprived people, always talking about "a better England."

• • •

The President is dead. Great wreath outside U.S. Embassy—"England Mourns its Best Friend and Humanity its Elder Brother." Embarrassed as the only American at Toynbee Hall meeting to be addressed from the chair and told of English sorrow. In the emotion of the moment breakfasted with a group of Americans, among them the composer Mark Blitzstein, who was reading a newspaper as we ate. He suddenly became heated at something he read unfriendly to the Soviet Union. He shouted "Outrageous! Slander! this should not be allowed!" To our astonishment he got up from the table in such a frenzy that he tipped the table over.

Interview with T.S. Eliot at Faber & Faber ostensibly on official business. In his first years here Eliot active in popular education, taught for the Workers Education Association and in evening classes sponsored by the London County Council. He must now be fifty-seven. Face has aged and relaxed greatly, so that one's first impression of him physically is of a rather tired kindness as opposed to the fey-like removal in his early photographs.

He was extremely kind, gentle, spoke slowly and hesitatingly. Livened up when I pushed the conversation to poetry. Looks like a very sensitive question mark—long, winding and bent. Gives the impression that his sensibility is in his long curling nose and astonishing hands. I was afraid that he would be standoffish and nervously yammer on, but to my relief he kept bringing the conversation back to America asking questions. He just verged on "you Americans." To my astonishment he asked, "By the way, what's this Truman like?" In the nick of time I replied—"You ought to know, you both

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come from Missouri!" He grinned. When I gave him Ted Spencer's regards he brightened up considerably and asked if I was a Harvard man. His office wall is lined with Harvard mementos.

• • •

Prostitutes seem to be as established a part of London life as buses. The ones I see in Piccadilly, where in the blackout GIs are always flicking their Zippo lighters to get a better look, are young, like to sound brassy and sharp. Imagine my surprise when, on leaving Julian Huxley's talk on his meetings with Russian scientists, I was accosted by a sweet old lady in a coat with a rabbity collar who friendly as could be asked, "Want a little pleasure, dearie?" It was noon, the sun was shining bright with all its might, and not knowing what to say to a whore who unbelievably resembled my tedious Aunt Sarah, I came up with, "But it's so early!" Whereupon she tittered, "Easier to see your way in!" and went off looking pleased with herself.

• • •

For months now, living in the billets in Gt. Cumberland Place, I have encountered every day a young man my age whose name is really Johnnie Smith. He is a kind of assistant porter or general utility man, and he talks in very broad cockney. Johnnie does not know that I am a brother to him and as scared as he is. He always calls me sir. Not sir at the beginning or the end of a sentence, but sir as a constantly intervening part of speech, sir as preposition, noun, verb, adjective. Well sir yes sir how do you do if you like sir. Sir. He stammers, is crestfallen, and in his recessive speech is all the plaintiveness of all the poor and frightened in the world—not to forget my dear mother talking English and my poor father talking anything. Once, when I was shaving, he called me twice to

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the telephone, and with my usual stupid impatience I must have sounded cross. His face flushed and he actually fell back before me. How ashamed I was—not merely because I had frightened him but because he really seems to believe—Jesus almighty!! that we are master and man.

This morning, after apologizing, I requested him not to sir me. He smiled sheepishly but looked a little suspicious.

• • •

A British medical detachment in the north German woods has stumbled on the Belsen concentration camp. Forty thousand sick, starving and dying prisoners on the ground. The report in *The London Times* begins, "I have something to report that lies beyond the imagination of mankind."

• • •

Peggy Ashcroft in *The Dutchess of Malfi*—trembling, innocent, fragile, so vulnerable, making me tremble as she was strangled before us. I was staggered by the perfect application of the words to humanity May, 1945 when Bosola came out with:

A long war disturb'd your mind;
Here your perfect peace is sign'd.
Of what is't fools make such vain keeping?
Sin their conception, their birth weeping,
Their life a general mist of error,
Their death a hideous storm of terror.
. . .

'Tis now full tide 'tween night and day;
End your groan, and come away.

Can a Jew still believe in God after reading the report by the Parliamentary Commission of Auschwitz? Four million

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deaths. The crematoria had a total capacity of five and a half million during the time they functioned. The commission investigated conditions at Maidenek, Treblinka and other annihilation camps, but describes Auschwitz as the worst in its experience. Theses were published on the experiments performed on human beings. Seven tons of women's hair were found ready for despatch to Germany. Human teeth, from which gold fillings had been extracted, were piled several feet high. One hundred thousand children's suits of clothes.

Can a Jew still believe? But whoever said "The Eternal Blessed Be He" could be distracted enough from whatever it is that occupies Him in Heaven to look down long enough to save a single infant from Hitler? It is not the God of the Jews that holds me but my fellow Jews, faithful to the end. Waiting out the rain in the entrance to a music store just as the radio is broadcasting the first Sabbath service from liberated Belsen, I weep with them as they say the *Shema* and say it with them. *Hear O Israel the Lord Our God the Lord is One.*

I did nothing to beat Hitler. I saved no one.

"Grandpa, what did you do during the war? What was your worst experience?"

"Surviving the martinis at the Hotel Connaught as I sat facing the monumental portrait of Victoria, Queen and Empress, and her 'immortal' words during the South African War. 'There is no pessimism in this house and there will be none.'"

• • •

Waiting in line at our Army P.O., hoping for a letter from Asya, I find that I am of some interest to a large handsome girl with brilliant black hair who is standing right behind me. She does surveys of English public opinion, she is from Madison and Seventieth, she is so sophisticated that she takes me in hand and without my quite knowing how all this got started so fast, I find myself in bed with her and enjoying her directness. Caroline says with a smile, "Isn't it amazing? A nice girl like me can end up having had as many men as . . ."

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When I tell her that I am about to leave for Paris, she replies with the total self-assurance with which she regards everything, "I'll see you when you return."

How right she was. When I managed to get on the Queen Mary packed with returning troops, she was there. When, despite all my V-mail begging her to stay, begging for us to start again, I discovered that Asya had fled our old apartment and in the ghastly housing shortage I ended up in a painter's rickety old studio on Pineapple Street in Brooklyn Heights—at least it was Brooklyn Heights—I returned late one night from a party to find Caroline sitting on the steps, waiting for me. Not that I minded, everything from that point on was all so delicious, rich and new. But I never really felt I had a choice in the matter.

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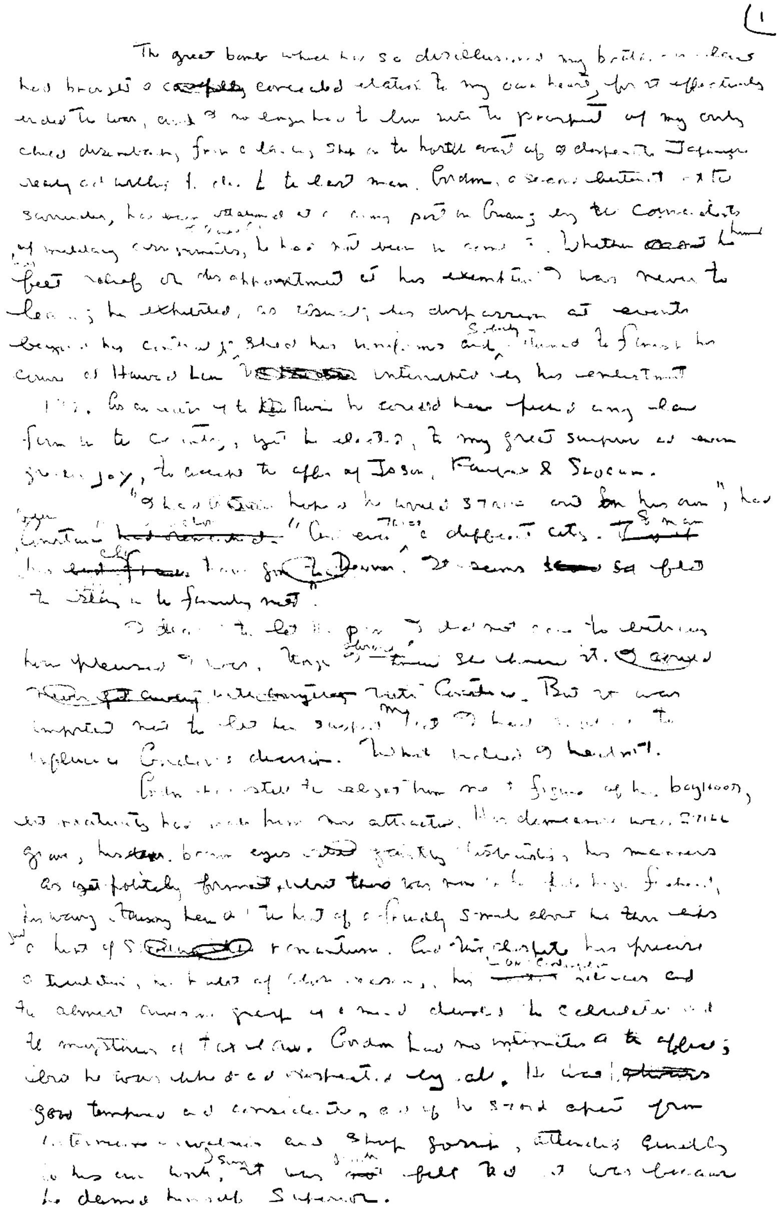

The great bomb which had so disillusioned my brother-in-law had brought a carefully concealed elation to my own heart, for it effectively ended the war, and I no longer had to live with the prospect of my only child's disembarking from a landing ship on the hostile coast of a desperate Japan ready and willing to die to the last man. Gordon, a second lieutenant at the surrender, had been stationed at a camp post in Georgia by the [illegible] of military [illegible], [illegible] had not been in combat. Whether he found it relief or disappointment at his exemption has never to my learning been established, as [illegible] his [illegible] at events beyond his control. [illegible] he shed his uniform and [illegible] to finish his course at Harvard Law interrupted by his enlistment [illegible]. [illegible] he could have picked any law firm in the country, but he elected, to my great surprise and even greater joy, to accept the offer of Jason, Fairfax & Slocum.

"I should have hoped he would start out on his own", had [illegible] "Or even in a different city. [illegible] from the [illegible]." It seems [illegible] [illegible] in the family nest.

[illegible] I did not care to [illegible] how pleased I was, [illegible] she knew it. [illegible] But it was important not to let her suspect that I had [illegible] influenced Gordon's decision. [illegible]

Gordon [illegible] still the [illegible] figure of his boyhood, [illegible] maturity had made him more attractive. His demeanor was still grave, his [illegible] brown eyes [illegible] [illegible], his manners as [illegible] politely formal, [illegible] [illegible], his [illegible] a [illegible] of a friendly smile about his thin lips and a hint of [illegible] romanticism. And [illegible] his precise [illegible], his [illegible] and the almost [illegible] grasp of a mind [illegible] to calculate [illegible] the mysteries of [illegible] law. Gordon had no intimates at the office, [illegible] he was [illegible] and respected by all. He was [illegible] good tempered and considerate, [illegible] he stood apart from [illegible] and shop gossip, attending [illegible] to his own work, it was [illegible] felt that it was because he deemed himself superior.

A manuscript page from a work in progress by Louis Auchincloss.

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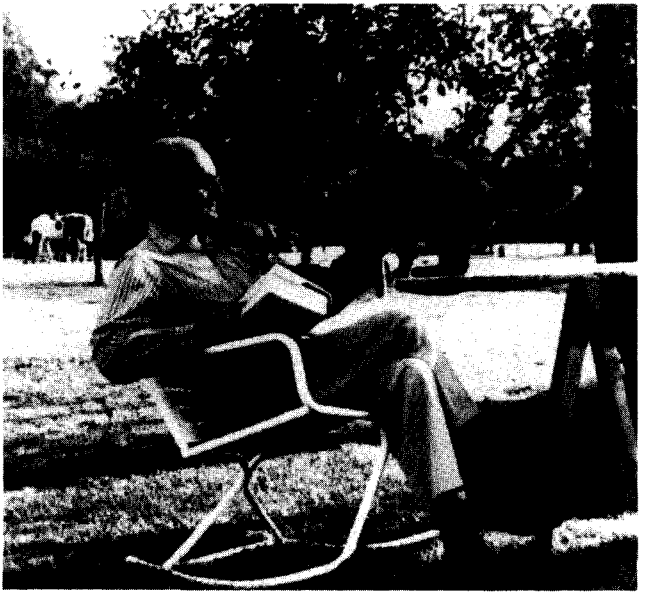
Louis Auchincloss

The Art of Fiction CXXXVIII



This interview was conducted on the stage of New York's the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street YMHA on the Upper East Side before a large and respectful audience. It seemed a rather curious setting in which to find Louis Auchincloss—a personage perhaps more suited to the comforts of the well-appointed drawing room in a brownstone mansion than the bare stage of an auditorium. He sat rather stiffly in a wood-backed chair turned three-quarters to the audience, a microphone set on a stand in front of him. The replies to his interviewer—delivered in the patrician accents one might expect—seemed quite clipped at times, as if to his way of thinking the answers required little amplification. One was reminded that his background is also legal—that it was while

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practicing law that he worked on his books . . . a parlay of occupations which has become increasingly popular and fruitful in recent times, as witness the success of Louis Begley, Scott Turow and John Grisham.

Louis Auchincloss was born on 27 September, 1917 at Lawrence, Long Island, the son of a Wall Street lawyer associated with the firm Davis, Polk. After graduating in 1935 from the Groton School (the venue for his most widely read novel, The Rector of Justin*), he attended Yale. There he wrote a four-hundred-page novel about love, suicide and prep-school life modeled on* Madame Bovary. *When it was rejected by Scribners, he despaired of what he referred to in his book* A Writer's Capital *as "dabbling in literature" and, in a complete renunciation of a literary career, quit Yale in his third year and enrolled at the University of Virginia School of Law. To his surprise he discovered that he liked the law. Upon his graduation he joined the prestigious firm of Sullivan and Cromwell. His progress in the practice of law was interrupted by World War II; he served in the U.S. Navy in both the Atlantic (where he took part in the Normandy landings as an executive officer aboard an L.S.T.) and the Pacific theaters of operations. Following the war he practiced law in New York, first at Sullivan and Cromwell, and then for many years with Hawkins, Delafield and Wood, where he was the head of the firm's trust and estates department.*

During his years as a lawyer he produced an astonishing amount of literary work—thirty-six novels and thirteen books of nonfiction. As his readers well know, Auchincloss's fictional territory is that of the aristocratic rich. He has often been referred to as the social anthropologist of the American upper class. Naturally, his work evokes comparisons with Edith Wharton and Henry James—authors he admires and about whom he has written extensively—and with the more recent writers, John P. Marquand and John O'Hara . . . all of whom have written in the timeworn tradition of the novel of manners. Indeed it can be said that Auchincloss rescued the novel of manners from obsolescence following the deaths of Marquand

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and O'Hara. Back in 1960, when Auchincloss pointed out that O'Hara's "strange, angry world" was actually the old-fashioned novel of manners in disguise, O'Hara took exception. In his best crusty style he wrote: "I can best reply by pointing out the fact that you obviously have read all my novels, and I have not read any of yours. I don't know anything about your importance as a lawyer, but in my league you are still a batboy, and forty-three is pretty old for a batboy."

Auchincloss didn't let the matter drop. Every time a critic linked the two (which was often) he clipped the review or article and mailed it to O'Hara with the signature, "The Batboy."

It was during the decade of the sixties that Auchincloss was most prolific. He wrote five novels, including The Rector of Justin, The Embezzlers, Portrait in Brownstone, A World of Profit, *and* The House of Five Talents *(the author's favorite).* The Rector of Justin, *published in 1964, was the most successful. It rose to the top of the best-seller lists where for thirty-five weeks it vied with Saul Bellow's* Herzog *for first place. It was nominated for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, but lost out—very likely because of the judges' adversion to Auchincloss's fixation on WASP society—to* Herzog *for the National Book Award and to Shirley Ann Grau's* The Keeper of the House *for the Pulitzer. Auchincloss was embittered: "What a silly racket," he wrote Gore Vidal, "and how silly of me to mind. But I do."*

*The Auchincloss oeuvre is by no means limited to fiction. His first collection of critical essays (*Reflections of a Jacobite*) was published in 1961—the first of his thirteen books of nonfiction. Not surprisingly, he has written a number of essays on Proust, as well as pieces on Bourget, Corneille, Daudet, Racine, Richelieu. A passionate Francophile, he was once described as a man who* daydreams *about the court at Versailles. Of the English he has written on Shakespeare and the nineteenth-century novelists, and of the Americans, Henry Adams, Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson, Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, among others, as well as, of course, John P. Marquand and John O'Hara.*

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In 1986 Auchincloss retired from the law. He spends his time with his wife Adele in the comfortable post-Victorian clutter of a large apartment on Park Avenue and a renovated farmhouse in Bedford, New York. There is no indication that his literary output has slackened. His newest, a collection of essays entitled The Style's the Man, *is due out this fall.*

INTERVIEWER

I'm sure the question most asked of you is how you can write about fifty full-length books, practice successfully as a lawyer and at the same time have something of a family life. I wonder which suffers most because of the others? One would hope not the law; your clients might be outraged.

LOUIS AUCHINCLOSS

Writing all those books never seemed to be such a trick, though I certainly don't think I could do it today with the law firms' enormous emphasis on hours and clocked time. I did have an estate practice, where the clients were usually dead, which is a help, for they couldn't always be pushing you.

INTERVIEWER

And therefore didn't mind . . .

AUCHINCLOSS

They didn't mind, but of course the heirs did, but then they weren't the clients. I found that writing took a bit of adjusting—essentially to be able to use little scratches of time to do it. Lots of writers have to have whole days or nights to get ready to write; they like to be by a fire, with absolute quiet, with their slippers on and a pipe or something, and then they're ready to go. They can't believe you can use five minutes here, ten minutes there, fifteen minutes at another time. Yet it's only a question of training to learn that trick. If they *had* to do it that way, they'd be able to, the real writers, that is. I can pick up in the middle of a sentence and then

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go on. I wrote at night; sometimes I wrote at the office and then practiced law at home. My wife and I never went away on weekends. I wouldn't recommend that anyone else try this method, but it worked for me. And it did for Trollope. I don't mean to compare myself to Trollope, but it was said that he made a habit of writing from nine to noon, and if he finished a novel at a quarter to twelve, he'd start another. Unfortunately, he put that all into his autobiography, which killed his reputation for decades because people wanted to think of writing as suffering.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you'd write better if you did suffer?

AUCHINCLOSS

No. And I don't think most writers do, either. I think Shakespeare got drunk after he finished *King Lear*. That he had a ball writing it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you get drunk after you finish one of your books?

AUCHINCLOSS

No, I don't. I'm a very regular person.

INTERVIEWER

Well, how much is the law a benefit? Supposing you had taken up another practice . . .

AUCHINCLOSS

. . . being a doctor? No, I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps not a doctor, but an insurance man, say. Wallace Stevens comes to mind.

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AUCHINCLOSS

Well, that would have been easy, because people in insurance work only from nine to five, at least the insurance men I know.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't the law give you situations where you say, "Aha, I will write about that!"?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, as I look back on my literary career, short stories about the law were suggested by what I had observed or heard of personalities encountered in my practice. I really wrote more about relationships of lawyers to one another in the practice of their profession than I did about actual legal situations. Arthur Train used to write about legal problems in his books; I've sometimes done that, but more often I used just the interaction between members of a firm.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose as a lawyer it's a great help to be able to pass something down the line to a libel lawyer to make sure that things haven't gotten out of hand.

AUCHINCLOSS

The only time I was threatened with a suit was when my publishers photographed a house on Fifty-third Street for the jacket of one of my novels. The owner of the house made noises about a suit. But it was pointed out to him that the only time you could possibly sue under those circumstances was if the house was recognizable, and if I had described it as something that reflected on the owner, such as a house of prostitution.

INTERVIEWER

How do you start off a novel . . . *The Rector of Justin,* say, which is one of the more beloved of your books?

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AUCHINCLOSS

That was coming for a long time. I spent six years in school at Groton in Massachusetts, and I always knew I was going to write something about the New England preparatory schools. It was universally believed that I took Endicott Peabody of Groton as my model, but I didn't. I read biographies of all the famous headmasters of his era, a considerable number of bad books. But they did have a lot in common. From them I was able to put my character together. Physically, I modeled him on Judge Learned Hand, whom I knew very well and strongly admired. I put a lot of Hand's sayings into the book. I even gave him three daughters, which he had, like King Lear; Judge Hand used to say, I can't remember which daughter told me this, Goneril or Regan. Yet the only reader who spotted him was Archibald MacLeish, who asked me, "Why doesn't everybody *see* that you've got Judge Hand in that novel?" I replied, "Because he's a headmaster." If you wrote a novel about Abraham Lincoln and made him a dentist, you could have him recite the Gettysburg Address and nobody would pick it up.

INTERVIEWER

How did Groton take it?

AUCHINCLOSS

The school didn't like it. I was absolutely persona non grata for a while. But at last they came around; on the centennial of the school they asked me to make the chief address. So we all became friends again.

INTERVIEWER

How did Endicott Peabody like it?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, he was dead.

INTERVIEWER

Oh . . . like your clients. How about the Peabody family?

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AUCHINCLOSS

They minded quite a lot at the start, but they were eventually conciliated by Marietta Tree, a granddaughter of Peabody, who told me, "I can't see anything of my grandfather in that book at all. It makes me realize that people didn't really know him. They think of a headmaster as just a loud noise." It's true that Dr. Peabody did once say that if a headmaster's vocabulary were reduced to a single word, and that word were "no," he could still get by.

INTERVIEWER

Do people in your books ever come up to you and say, "I recognize myself"?

AUCHINCLOSS

They certainly do, but they're usually so far off, it's ridiculous. I remember a great tax lawyer, Norris Darrell, a very literal man with a marvelous mathematical mind, who accused me of putting him in a story. The story was about a passionate diarist. Eventually, the man comes to *live* for his diary; his whole life is oriented around seeking items for it. It is the tail wagging the dog. I asked Norris, "Why would you assume you were that character? Do *you* keep a diary?" He said, "Heavens no!" I asked: "Then what was it in the story that made you think you were the character?" He replied: "He was the senior tax partner in his firm." Well, that's usually the sort of thing a writer runs into.

INTERVIEWER

Has anybody come up to you and been accurate?

AUCHINCLOSS

Once. The very first book I wrote was under a pen name. A man called Kenneth Pendar, now long deceased, saw himself rather unfavorably described as the principal character; there was some truth in it. I resolved never to do that again because his feelings were badly hurt, and I felt like a heel.

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INTERVIEWER

But is that usually the way you deal with a character; you start with somebody you recognize and then add on little bits and pieces from other people so they won't be recognized?

AUCHINCLOSS

That's right. It's very rare that a character comes to mind complete in himself. He needs additional traits that I often pick from actual people. One way you can cover your tracks is to change the sex.

INTERVIEWER

Have you actually done that?

AUCHINCLOSS

I have.

INTERVIEWER

To whom?

AUCHINCLOSS

Oh, well, I won't say.

INTERVIEWER

I would think the character would become utterly different.

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, you have to make certain necessary changes . . . *vive la différence!* But the salient, essential traits of a character are often the same in a man as in a woman.

INTERVIEWER

Do you keep a very tight rein on your characters? Would a man change back into a woman?

AUCHINCLOSS

In my novel *The Embezzler* the main character changed as I wrote it. His motivations changed. I never was quite sure I

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had him exactly right. He bewildered me a good deal. He was the nearest I've come to a complete and totally fictional character.

INTERVIEWER

Had you known an embezzler?

AUCHINCLOSS

No, but there was the Richard Whitney case. In a lot of my books I take great events in my own lifetime that I've been in a position to view fairly closely. When I was at Yale, the Richard Whitney case made a tremendous effect on the whole of New York, especially the downtown world; it wasn't believed that the president of the New York Stock Exchange could behave that way. He embezzled the Stock Exchange gratuity fund, his wife's trust fund and some funds belonging to the New York Yacht Club. They represented a total of $300,000. What he owed was twenty million dollars. J.P. Morgan & Co., of which his brother was a partner, would have bailed him out except for the $300,000. When they found out about that, they had to drop him because they couldn't abet a crime, certainly not after they talked to their lawyers. Oddly enough, the crime involved only a trivial part of his deals, and yet it was the thing that upset the whole apple cart. Had he not embezzled, Morgan would have seen him through.

Today the case would hardly make the front pages. In those days it was incredible what shock waves it made. So I made no bones about using the case; I wanted to get the facts exactly right. When I put characters into the situation, however, I made them up. Even the Whitney family recognized that, though at first they were uneasy. They had objected. I knew them all. They said, "You're going to stir up this whole miserable thing." I said, "It's history, it's absolute history."

INTERVIEWER

When you changed his character did you change him from a Harvard man to a Yale man?

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AUCHINCLOSS

No, I left him a Harvard man. I'm a Yale man myself.

INTERVIEWER

What about plot? How important is that to you?

AUCHINCLOSS

Plot is very important to the kind of novel that I write. I've sometimes overdone it. I'll never forget Elizabeth Janeway saying a lot of plot "rumbles around." Every now and then criticism really gets to you, and that really got to me, because I thought she was right. I slimmed down my plots after that.

INTERVIEWER

I'm not quite sure I understand what she meant by a lot of plot rumbling around . . .

AUCHINCLOSS

Too much of it, too noticeable. It should have been swept under the rug.

INTERVIEWER

Is it a good idea to sweep plot under the rug?

AUCHINCLOSS

Once somebody's aware of a plot, it's like a bone sticking out. If it breaks through the skin, it's very ugly.

INTERVIEWER

E.M. Forster in *The Longest Journey* suddenly kills off a character by having him "broken up in a football game."

AUCHINCLOSS

Yes, he does things like that with his characters.

INTERVIEWER

Shouldn't they be killed off naturally?

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AUCHINCLOSS

Anything's all right if you're a person of genius. With him, it's all right.

INTERVIEWER

But you wouldn't do that.

AUCHINCLOSS

I would not dare do what Forster does with his characters. He comes into his books sometimes and talks about them; he'll say, "So-and-so really was an ass." It's quite startling to hear Forster do that, but that's his particular thing. Thackeray was like that too.

INTERVIEWER

But plot's essential, don't you think?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, I don't know. Nathalie Sarraute wouldn't think so.

INTERVIEWER

Which do you think is the more important, plot or character?

AUCHINCLOSS

It depends upon what type of novel you're writing and who's writing it. If the character's really strong enough you hardly need any help at all. *Hamlet* as a play has an enormous amount of plot, but it really hardly needs any when you've got a character as fascinating as the central man.

INTERVIEWER

Can we back up a little bit? When did you know that you actually wanted to be a writer?

AUCHINCLOSS

My junior year at Yale I wrote a novel and sent it to Scribners. It was turned down with a very polite letter saying they'd be

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interested in seeing something else of mine, but I was quite irrationally discouraged. I decided I must give up writing altogether, and I quit Yale to go to law school at the University of Virginia, which in those days would take you without a bachelor's degree. My father said, "Why don't you finish Yale?" I said, "Because I've got to start another career right away. I'm just too shocked by this thing." He said, "But you'll spend the rest of your life explaining why you don't have a Yale degree." And he was right. I still am.

I was going to be a lawyer and just a lawyer, but I did write again in the summers. I wrote another novel, which I then destroyed. I threw it in the garbage pail. Then I was terribly upset. I rushed around to find it, but of course the garbage had been taken away. The novel was gone. I have no doubt it was an appropriate part of the garbage. Then I started practicing law. During the war I wrote another novel, and that novel I published.

INTERVIEWER

Was there anything in those early unpublished novels of use later on?

AUCHINCLOSS

The first one at Yale remained with me for a long time. Oddly enough, only a few years ago in my novel *The Lady of Situations* I reincorporated its basic plot. It was about a woman whom I identified with the feminist movement of the time. It was very badly reviewed, I think, because some critics failed to realize that my woman in the 1930s had to be what she was. Betty Friedan recognized it, but few other people did. My point was that a woman of her day, however ambitious, had only two professions where she could hit the top—nursing and teaching. She didn't want to be either. She wanted to be a writer, but she was a bad writer. Eventually, in order to get where she wanted, she had to use sex, though she was rather

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a cold person. I thought it was one of my best books, but *The New York Times* daily critic killed it.

INTERVIEWER

What about early reading? Who were the writers you particularly admired, who made you think you wanted to become a writer? What gave you a sense that you could be a writer?

AUCHINCLOSS

I had always had the idea of being a writer. That had always been an important thing from way back.

INTERVIEWER

Were there writers in your family?

AUCHINCLOSS

None.

INTERVIEWER

Had you met a writer?

AUCHINCLOSS

I knew Mr. Arthur Train. I didn't enormously admire his work, but I liked the man very much. He was a great friend of my family's. He wrote those Ephraim Tutt stories. They're rather forgotten today.

INTERVIEWER

But he wasn't your literary forebear.

AUCHINCLOSS

I was a Henry James and Edith Wharton fan from way, way back.

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INTERVIEWER

Have you seen the movie *The Age of Innocence*?

AUCHINCLOSS

I reviewed it. I loved it. It's a great movie. It reflects the book absolutely and entirely; it recognizes fully the vital effect of the decoration, the houses, on the characters. Scorsese has directed it so as to make you feel all the ugly pictures and the great lavish interiors; they're almost characters themselves, the way they are in the book. Edmund Wilson described Edith Wharton as the "pioneer and poet of interior decoration." Scorsese *sees* that. It's the best translation of a book into a film I've ever seen, except *Gone with the Wind,* which I think was a very great movie, but a less great book.

INTERVIEWER

What about training for writing? Do you approve of these courses that one can take?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, I don't believe it can be taught. A person who is a writer already might benefit from such a course. I've never taken one, and I don't really know how it's done, but I don't think a person who's not a writer could possibly be turned into one by taking a course.

INTERVIEWER

What is the relationship between you and the editor?

AUCHINCLOSS

I have a very good editor, and I like him very much, but basically he prints what I send in.

INTERVIEWER

They don't call up and suggest that you leave out chapter eight.

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AUCHINCLOSS

No, they don't.

INTERVIEWER

They wouldn't dare?

AUCHINCLOSS

I think they would dare, but they're too busy editing memoirs for generals and senators and other V.I.P.'s. They really have to work on those books.

INTERVIEWER

Do you consider yourself in competition with other writers?

AUCHINCLOSS

I don't think so, no.

INTERVIEWER

Do you get any sense of glee when a writer who's been overemphasized gets it in a review?

AUCHINCLOSS

I'm not like Gore Vidal, who said, "Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies." But I know what he means.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have much contact with fellow writers?

AUCHINCLOSS

Right after the war I used to go down to the White Horse Tavern where Vance Bourjaily would assemble young, up-and-coming writers. He had an incredible eye, because every single person he had there made their name sooner or later. But the meetings were interminable and the talk less than brilliant.

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As a hard-working lawyer I needed a more ordered lifestyle. When I married Adele, she said, "Oh, we're going to see all these wonderful writers." One night Calder Willingham called just as we were about to go to bed. He asked if we'd come out and drink with him. I said, "Well, I don't think Adele wants to do that." "Then why don't you come?" His idea was we'd sit up all night. I said, "No, I don't do that." I had to get up in the morning. So for a while I didn't see writers much. But after we got older they quieted down, the survivors anyway, so I saw some of them again.

INTERVIEWER

So you would say that stability and an ordered life . . .

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, they were absolutely necessary for me because I was carrying on two things at once.

INTERVIEWER

So if you had to build a writer would discipline be a formidable part of his equipment?

AUCHINCLOSS

Particularly for an American writer. Peter Prescott was writing a book about booze and American writers, how it's perfectly extraordinary how many American writers were alcoholics. Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser, Fitzgerald—the list goes on and on.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you suppose they drink so much?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, that I don't know.

INTERVIEWER

What did Peter Prescott say?

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AUCHINCLOSS

I don't think he finished the book.

INTERVIEWER

Uh-oh! Perhaps it's because writers don't have enough to do?

AUCHINCLOSS

That may well be true. I think you may have a point about the in-between times. If they're not writing, writers often get very nervous and tense and then they're apt to feel, "Oh, I'll never write again; this will never come back." And then they perhaps solace themselves with a drink.

INTERVIEWER

Do you drink more now that you've retired from the law?

AUCHINCLOSS

No, no, I drink exactly the same amount.

INTERVIEWER

How much do you write a day?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, I don't push myself at all. If I don't want to write, I don't write. I feel I've written enough.

INTERVIEWER

When does the urge come to write? Is it an idea that pops into your mind?

AUCHINCLOSS

Well, there's no point writing if you don't have the idea. It's got to be the right idea. The only thing that I've ever read that I thought perfectly described the writer's situation is *The*

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Notebooks of Henry James. When they first came out, people were rather upset because his central ideas seemed to start from such trivial sources: somebody would sit next to him at dinner and talk about some woman who'd had an argument with her son about the dining-room furniture. Then he made the idea his own and began to add to it; it began to grow. I know that feeling: suddenly, "That's mine!" If he told anyone what it was, they'd say, "Why, that's nothing." And, of course, it *is* just nothing. But it's a seed.

The opposite is when people say, "Oh, I've got the most wonderful story for you. My uncle . . ." And so on. You can never use that because the only interesting thing about the story is that it's true. The moment you put it into a novel or a short story, it ceases to be true. How could you write a novel about a president of the United States who taped himself into an impeachment? Who would believe it? Novels must have verisimilitude, and truth has little enough of that.

INTERVIEWER

So you would hear a conversation at a dinner table, à la Henry James, and that would be the seed?

AUCHINCLOSS

It would usually be a particular relationship. Something struck me about a mother and son, or husband and wife, something that to *me* was novel or interesting.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever thought of doing a stage adaptation of one of your books?

AUCHINCLOSS

I have done that, and I've written plays, too, though nothing was ever produced but a single one-act drama. It is much less common for novelists to write plays than it used to be, because dialogue is less important than what Elia Kazan has called "incandescence." Where would Galsworthy, a successful playwright, be today?

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INTERVIEWER

You're very prolific. How much rewriting do you do?

AUCHINCLOSS

That varies. *The Rector of Justin,* for example, I rewrote the entire thing. But ordinarily I find that when I have to rewrite, there's something basically wrong. My best stuff usually comes out quite straight almost the first time.

INTERVIEWER

How can you tell that it's right?

AUCHINCLOSS

Oh, I just feel it. Once you feel it, nobody can convince you that it's not right.

INTERVIEWER

Do you start with page one and go through to the end?

AUCHINCLOSS

Oh yes, I have the whole thing outlined before.

INTERVIEWER

You do that the way one would do a legal brief?

AUCHINCLOSS

Yes, in a way. I start at the beginning and put the thing right through.

INTERVIEWER

Do you know the last line before you get there?

AUCHINCLOSS

I don't know the last line, but I know what's going to happen.

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INTERVIEWER

Is style an important consideration when you write?

AUCHINCLOSS

As the Comte de Buffon said, "The style's the man."

INTERVIEWER

What does that mean?

AUCHINCLOSS

Your literary style reflects your personality.

INTERVIEWER

Do you inform what you write with a moral judgment for the reader?

AUCHINCLOSS

I don't think so, no. I didn't write *The Embezzler* to tell people not to embezzle.

INTERVIEWER

Have you read the recent biography of you?

AUCHINCLOSS

Oh yes!

INTERVIEWER

Did you have a good time with it?

AUCHINCLOSS

Yes, it's much too nice to me; it hasn't sold too well.

INTERVIEWER

Which of your books would you like to be remembered for?

AUCHINCLOSS

The three that have just been republished by Galahad Books in a single volume called *Family Fortunes: The Rector of Justin,*

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The House of Five Talents and *Portrait in Brownstone*. I was very pleased to have them reissued, because two of them were completely out of print. I was glad to have them back.

INTERVIEWER

What do you put down as your occupation on your passport?

AUCHINCLOSS

I usually say retired lawyer.

INTERVIEWER

Period.

AUCHINCLOSS

Yes.

—George Plimpton

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After Ranji

Paul West

My brain worked better when I was playing the game full time, straining my body six days a week out there on the sunbaked arena of the field, hurling the ball at demonic speed, scampering after it, steadying myself to catch it while staring into the sun, hitting it with exquisitely timed force. Those were the days, on the greensward as the poets among us called it, with the various buff-colored linen or canvas tents billowing in the breeze, the crowd moaning or raving as we did this or that, and, oh bliss at the end, the long drinks. I am thinking of the Gymkhana Ground, Bombay: better than most, with mowable grass and august temple-like buildings just beyond the fringe of the playing area, as if our antics were sacrificial offerings to one of the massive religions. One sign, I think, read MY PETAL, and there was another word below it, also in red, that in all my years of play I never took the trouble to go and read. I was too tired or too forgetful, possibly more aware of white minarets behind the nearer steeples. There were always those spectators who, instead of watching, sauntered around, turned their backs to watch birds, or plunged their noses into food they had brought along. Sometimes, I felt,

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nobody watched us at all but needed our doings for vibration or faint genteel agitation out in the heat shimmer. You played on, heedless of their oblivion, knowing that one day, even if you were only half-decent at the game, you would be given a benefit match from which you would receive all the proceeds, good or bad. That, the theory went, would set you up for life, not with a Rolls Royce and live-in belly dancers, but humbly, with fish and chips or chips with curry a couple of times a day and a mattress to put sheets on.

You were not supposed to care about such matters, anyway. The game was the thing, not the money; you played it for love and magic, knowing that, if you did especially well with the bat, you would evoke the great Ranjitsinhji (or Ranji), and that was all you needed on Earth and all you needed to know. In your dreams, if you were that good, the great Ranji would stroll out from the pavilion as you walked back in at the end of the greatest innings you had ever played and embraced you right there in front of thousands. And you covered in sweat, your hair a salted curd. I was always hoping for a Ranji-hug, or even a pat on the back, but the grand moment never came, neither during play nor in my dreams. What did happen in my dreams, though, was that I played with an outstanding team of oldsters, all with impeccable reputations, and they treated me as one of them: hearty, jovial, civil, as if their lives would not be complete without me.

We played against successive layers: tents, trees, brown temples, white temples, and behind these the whole sorry catafalque of India, all those who had not the urge or the money or the energy to come watch us play. Compared to what they did, scrabbling for a few coins or a ball of rice, what we did was trivial, except that, really, the ball was a tiny thing much in demand, certainly when contrasted with the vastness of the field we played in, the enormous fame of our sport around the world. To touch the ball during play was to be galvanized beyond the torments of hunger and sleeping in the streets; but we knew, some of us, we were a razor blade's width from disaster, and that later in life things would get worse as we

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became too lame to play. So, logically enough, we played harder than ever in order to keep ourselves fit to play harder than ever. It worked until you reached forty, forty-five perhaps, and then you had to step down into umpiring (if you could), coaching, working the scoreboard, things as menial as that after the days of applauded glory. There was always this edge to your performance: Will I be as good as this next year? Or, if you were playing badly, Just think how much worse you will be next year. Thankful to have some facility with English, taught me by a man named Engineer, I expected not too harsh a middle age, perhaps reporting for some newspaper, damning feats I could no longer perform. You played with a cold wind from the future blowing upon your sticky neck. No matter how good you were, the body would rot, as I was to discover, so you were better off being burned early and dumped into the Ganges to become waterlogged confetti.

Yet we were always being tempted to become more efficient, more elegant, almost inhumanly suave, so that, when we played, the applause was incessant, the crowd went home with numb hands, unable to sleep for dreaming of unthinkable prodigies we would execute on the morrow. We would strike the ball beyond those white minarets. We would hurl it at well beyond one hundred miles an hour. We would take catches that actually struck flame from our calloused palms. This *we*, of course, is the team we, or the sport we, nothing a nurse would say; which is to limn the illusion of total excellence, the notion of contest vanishing into some noble vision of the sport, our true competition being gravity, the flesh, light, the structure of the eye, the sudden occurrence of rain, dark, and wind. Prevailing over the elements, both teams would march off together into the tents, to take tea from steaming urns, all thought of the result forgotten. We were revised men, destined to take the sport to Mars.

This is an almost religious view of the game, is it not? Imagine the plight of those who emigrated to countries where the game goes unknown, or certainly unplayed, and they go homesick to some so-called Indian restaurant next door to a

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novelty store that carries videocassettes for rent of popular Indian films—romances—and they haltingly ask the émigré proprietor if there are films to rent of the game. *What* game? They say its name, and the look of affronted incredulity forms. It must be wounding to be so far from home, a poor enough home at that, with none of the consolations of the old way. Such would Catholics be without their cross. Mediocre as my fate has been, I have contained myself within my own country and restricted myself to countries that honor the game and play it raptly, even searching for new minutiae of finesse in its vicissitudes, in its very rules. Those who have never played cannot know the bright-enough-to-shave-by polish on the ball when it is new, the soft shimmy of the bat when you hit the ball just right and a vibration runs the length of the wood, smoothing and easing long before it jars your hands (which it does not do because the bat handle is cored with rubber inlays). When you catch the ball on a sunny day, it is as if you have caught the sun itself and the retina image lingers in your head for a quarter of an hour, bringing the sun down and setting it horizontally between you and all you survey. I even cared about the umpires in their short smocks, caressing in their pockets the six or eight pebbles that stood for the number of times the bowler had bowled. Best of all the spastic walk of triumph after getting someone out, as if the proud executant were being mildly electrocuted. Or, if he does not rise to that, he does a slow roly-poly run with fists high and elbows far back, slapping hands with anyone he meets in the field. When you have made a living at this kind of thing, your sense of delight narrows; you develop an honorable bigotry for what you yourself are good at.

But, of course, you have to be fit enough to do it. They boo you dead when you begin to creak, begin stopping the ball with your foot instead of crouching to take it by hand. Your eyes blur, your broken fingers refuse to work in unison, your timing errs; you become an elegant incompetent, included in the team but, as far as possible, placed where you can do least damage, which strictly speaking is nowhere. Sooner or

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later you drop an important catch, trip over your own feet while chasing a speeding ground ball, or throw with all the aplomb of a water buffalo. Then they look down their noses at you and, next game, make you Reserve, doomed to sit out the game in the building splendidly named pavilion. All you do is carry out trays of drinks and, sometimes, substitute for an injured player, one who, as the quaint idiom has it, "Retired Hurt." At that point you would be better off joining the local fire brigade or becoming, as I did for a brief while, a professional letter writer, for a pittance taking dictation and creating from it a ripe old copperplate whose daintiness belied even the most tragic message. Indeed, I wrote the bad news much more prettily. A typewriter would have helped, but I was never that sublimely technical. Writing down the buried sentiments of others, I let my mind dwell on unique parabolas the ball had made, or catches made before the ball had even seemed to move toward the clutching hand, or savage dives made at the boundary rope to keep the ball in play. Or I would linger on such a word as *pavilion*, on its regal connotations: striped awnings, fluttering silks, combed and brushed horses pawing the turf, pennants on high poles, parasols, shooting sticks, binoculars, ascots, straw boaters, champagne bottles being opened. Such were my pavilions, and their awnings were not of canvas; the field of the cloth of gold, rather, ourselves the princes lolling in the shade as we waited our turn to bat or careering about, bat in hand, in the center of the arena, scoring with reckless refinement. I was one of the few who loved the game in the round, for its social and metaphysical aspects as well as for its lure as a sport. It was social history as well as athletics. It was smoldering doldrum religion. It was elongated reverie. It was a ritual with choir in white and, like a hymnal board, the score in shifting figures arranged by an amputated hand that crept out from a gap in the planks and just as swiftly vanished.

All that foppery, mine.

Incandescent memory has scars to show.

Enough, I was going to recall great Ranji, the magician,

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with hair cut short and brushed into a shiny quiff, his silk shirt flowing and rippling as he melted from one posture into another. They said he drew the ball to him rather than plunged out to it. He seduced the ball's ghost. Supple as a squirrel, he struck the ball, and the sound was solider than it should have been considering the amount of wood he hit it with. Had he struck it with a tree, the plonk could not have been more bass-baritone. The ball scampered to be away from him and his debonair maltreatment. It was timing, of course, but it was also his having clear in his mind the apparition of the ball some several hundred yards away from him; the ball was gone before it came, and when it arrived it had only that one destiny to fulfill: to peel away from him enchanted and snubbed, smacked home with apology. How did he do it?

Sleeved down, the cuffs linked with fine jewelry.

The hair shiny with thick white cream congealed now into a crisp retainer.

The hands, ah the hands! pliant on wrists that rotated through three hundred and sixty degrees.

Dead still until the ball came near him, then a predatory flash all shooting star and snake charmer—nothing to see except Ranji inert again, recoiled, and the ball racing away as from the scene of something shameful.

High cheekbones. Cropped mustache. After two hundred scored, he would sometimes fiddle with his links and fold back his cuffs a little, like someone preparing to go through old bank receipts.

Slight. Pulsing with blood. Urgent in stillness, languid in triumph.

What did he say to me that once? Don't hit it, guide it. Use its own force against it. The world behind you does not exist. When the ball is behind you, you will not need to play it. Concentrate on what is coming at you, and what confronts you. The people waiting to catch you behind will be powerless if you never let the ball go near them.

I saw, but I could never quite forget what was behind me. I wore my sleeves down, cuffs buttoned, and I even fastened

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the button of my collar, aiming to seem more formal and less plebeian. I worshipped him from the bottom of my height. I never played against him, lucky I, nor did we ever meet in the same tent for, in India as in England, the Athens of the game, amateurs such as he (who played without salary) dressed and waited in their own tent, more a pavilion than it was a tent. In England, gentlemen walked out of the pavilion onto the playing field through a separate gate denied those called Players, who had a similar but separate gate of their own. Such classy segregation vanished when, trying out my prowess at the nets under the eye of several luminaries, Ranji included (his active career waning by then), I almost broke my heart to do my best and be taken on as a regular player (no gentleman, I). Trying hard to hurl the ball so it burst into flame, I felt again that strange explosive craving, as if mind were berating body. I stretched inwardly, my head ached, my muscles began to twitch and shiver. More than stage fright, it was grandiose yearning, and I felt the same things when I took the bat and tried to hit with the force of three men. Up he came, in a kind of diplomatic wobble, and asked me what I thought I was doing. Tosh, he said, using a word picked up in England, you're a natural. So—be natural, young fellow-me-lad. He told me to breathe deeply, to flex my muscles before doing anything, and to picture what I wanted in its most perfect version. In the mind's eye. He was right. It worked, and it was then that I began to copy his way of speaking: prolonging the vowels so as to have time to think, or just to irritate everyone by making them wait and wait.

I knocked the shine off the ball in matches. I used the shine to make the ball swerve this way and that. I caught with perspiration-sodden palms. I was what they called an all-rounder, doing a bit, sometimes a lot, of everything: jack of all trades, but obsessively at heart less a batsman than a bowler infatuated with ballistics. Streaking toward the man with the bat, my ball fizzed and whirred, achieving a presence of its own in that restricted area, aimed usually at the blind spot that is always there, thank God. Sometimes I slung beam-

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ers right at the batsman's head, and hit him, but just as often I pitched the ball short and made it rear up, head-height again. If you couldn't bowl them out, the saying went, you knocked them out. I was murderous in this because I had powerful back muscles; I reared backward, then slammed all forward, gasping with the effort, a human slingshot, and I rejoiced in the ball's weird transit, curving about and dipping fast, more audible than visible at the other end where the poor devil stood that had to strike it away from him or, simply, get out of its way. These were the years of exultant, feral momentum, when a young athlete is a law unto himself, doing things wrong but doing them so fast and harshly that it mattered little. Unorthodox, toshy (as Ranji'd say), I, of only medium height, got them out. I dismissed them, as those with formal English say; I offed them, as those with English less formal put it. Benign executioner, I would come charging in at a diagonal to the pitch of play and fling the ball with an accuracy that had no need of aim. My muscles knew what to do, even when my eyes didn't look. Of course, I varied my onslaught, sometimes bowling a slower ball, but sometimes one so fast I almost got a hernia producing it, sometimes actually tripping over my own feet as I let the ball fly. That extra five miles an hour was devilish effective against someone accustomed to a bombardment of slower stuff. Walking back to the scar the toe of my boot had made in the turf, to the end of my run, I would polish the ball on my long cream trousers, and on a piece of silk secreted in my pocket. Polish one half only, so as to make the ball veer. Then, in time, the polish wore off and the slower bowlers took over, able to grip and spin it, and I hated that lapse in the material world, knowing how long would be the wait until we got a second new ball and I could play trajectories again with first and middle fingers curved like leeches around the seam, my thumb similarly glued to the underside. That was the way to do it. The rest was in the muscles and the high action of your arm. What a way to earn a living: play sinfully sustained while the rest of the world had work.

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It was like being in paradise. I was a pony scampering around a field. I was a tiger slinking in the shade, hoping for easy prey. I was the protégé of princes, a lethal royal toy wound up and set loose among other toys, sworn to do them in. Even in the worst heat, I was a blissful performer, knowing in my delirium that an elephant awaited me to carry me home, having picked me up with his trunk, fawning gently on me as if I were Sabu and Ranji rolled into one. Oh the calm of the evenings, with all the heaving done and lights picking out the outlines of huge untidy temples not far from the field of play. If the destiny of man was to run and throw, then I had achieved the godlike incarnation of it, mind abolished, language squandered; I was a tutored animal whom they unleashed in the cool of mid-morning, just to see what he would accomplish today that he didn't yesterday. Out I went, to work an undiscovered self to death in sight of everyone. And when I failed, as I did sometimes at bat, I saw the failure as a mere fluctuation in my atoms: nothing to worry or laugh about. The slip, or the mistiming of the blow struck at the ball, merely told me I was alive, and would survive to play the shot aright another day. And so be it.

Tosh, I told myself, using his word with as much reverence as if I had borrowed his handkerchief.

Ta, I'd say, saying thank you. Let's have some cha. It was teatime, the Tea Interval, beloved of imperialists.

You fit to bowl some more? The captain knew I never said no. Bowl till dark, I told him. I have the devil in me today.

If you get tired, he said brusquely, tell—

Sooner be dead, sir, I told him.

I'll watch you carefully.

You'll see me dead first, I told him.

We'll bury you under the pitch, he answered.

Thank you, sire, I said. Under where the marl has made it hardest (marl makes the ground like concrete and aids the speeding ball). With awl and hammer you might make an impression, but not much. Under that you'd be safe from the commotions of the ages, the bombs and blights, British

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artillery and Japanese dive-bombers. What a lovely idea: to be buried beneath India and gradually stretch your legs like tree branches to Goa, Pondicherry, Lucknow, Kashmir, and the Mouths of the Ganges. What a lovely idea after racing about like a greyhound during your young manhood, your pretext no more than a five and a half ounce ball with a shiny leather rind. Was that what the Japanese wanted from Australia? An understanding of the national game, of its sleepwalking aloofness? Surely the game was played on some of the islands they seized. A little attention and they need not have gone farther, but gone home and carved some bats.

There will be those who, with happy abandon, think they are reading this, whereas what you are doing is reading my mind, overhearing it, auscultating it like a doctor. You see, I am only a voice, and not an accessible one either; the only way to voice the pain of my mind is to appear to write something down, as if someone had commissioned me to indite a letter for them, cheap rate. So long as I get through, as telephonists used to say in India, nothing else matters—except that in India the telephonist cannot refer to long distance calls as they do in England, calling them trunk calls. It is different here, where we still press buttons A and B and call a collect call a transferred charge, which sounds as if the Light Brigade of Lord Alfred Tennyson's famous poem had been aimed at Delhi instead. I am moaning into space, sir. I have no target to aim at except the supposed presence of less than alien ears not far away. I am looking back on the crystal days, when the plant I was was burgeoning, putting a big flagrant bloom into the steam-sick air. It begins well, a life, and then it goes to pot, yet you have to go on living it as if you have signed some agreement or other. There are no alternatives, just as there are no alternatives to the game I played.

Then I buck up and tell myself I am transmitting in the blind, not a timid thing to do, and worth a smile into the void.

Some things were hard to learn and you had to practice them in private as well as on the field. To make bare-handed

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catches you needed both to give with the ball as it hit you, judging the exact degree of movement, and have a tough hand to absorb the impact. Some toughened their hands by soaking them in alum, used for stiffening paper components in old-fashioned radios. Sometimes, yielding to the hard-hit ball, you took its thud right into your chest, just below the breast-bone, and remained breathless even as cheers continued. Then there was throwing from the deep outfield, preferably (unless you were an absolute genius at it) a one-bounce into the big thick gloves of the wicket-keeper awaiting it. This took strength and a good eye. In theory you stared at the spot to which the ball was supposed to go, and there it went. Some would loft the ball in with a straight arm, gaining accuracy that way at the expense of speed. It was then that the ball got heavier, the arm weaker, the distant waiting hands farther away. Other demands included knowing when to duck and lie flat as some hefty batsman mashed the ball at you from only five feet away when you were fielding in the most dangerous position of all: silly mid-on, one of those loveable terms that non-players find willfully obscure. Every antic has its codes. How to catch such a ball, heading for your stomach at a hundred and twenty miles an hour, was a matter for learned guesswork. Even if you gave enough with it, it could kill you. The best answer came from bull fighting: you sucked in your belly so that the ball whizzed past it, then you put both hands behind it and accepted it with a hunched sideways travelling motion of harmonious sublimity. In other words, you flicked sideways on and caught the ball as if still facing it, taking your arms across you and away as the ball caught up with them. Once, after his England days, when he had returned to India to become the hereditary ruler he was (Maharajah Jam Sahib of Nawanagar), Ranji was heard to say of just such a motion, "Tedious near to you, sir!" Broken fingers told the tale, fingers that in my case refused any longer to work together but stuck out at awkward angles begging to be broken again. One young woman of my acquaintance informed me she would rather be bitten by a diseased hurgila than caressed with such a bust-up hand.

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More difficult, though, than any of these physical feats was something that haunted my mind toward the end of my playing days. How had I looked, running up to bowl, and then in the actual delivery with all that effort, all those heavings of muscle? I could never picture myself, neither the slowly accelerating pantherine run-up nor the lissome back-melt immediately prior to releasing the ball. I had been smooth and agile, I knew, but why could I never see myself in the act? I began to believe I had been clumsy and uncoordinated, undeserving of hand-claps and cheers. A little old-fashioned I may have been, but surely never as bad as that. Rheumatic as I was, I tried myself out, running in private or even in the street when a clear path presented itself amid the mêlée of pedestrians, and I more or less repeated the old elegant, storming rush. It was my mind's eye that let me down; I did not exist in my own imagination, though no doubt in the imaginations of countless former spectators who knew all the oddities of my performance. Some told me of them: a wholly unnecessary sideways extension of the little fingers, as if I were excruciated; a grimace narrowing my top lip into invisibility; several nervous toe taps before starting my run. I remembered none of this nor, re-enacting myself, knew I had done all of it—fingers, grimace, toe-taps—again. In the end I stopped trying to view myself as I had been and discarded that lovely run of mine as an old foxtrot mocked before its time. It was like what I heard later, when a siren slowed down and its final wails became the choked yelps of a smothered dog. How odd, though, to lose the vision of yourself when you had supreme prowess and flowed through the motions with effortless joy. I felt pawnbroked (or is it pawnbroken?). Time, if it erases anything, should take away disgrace.

It occurred to me that much of what I'd thought my best was imaginary, like my thinking Ranji was with me on the team all the time, opining and cajoling, reminiscing about his days for Cambridge, Sussex and England. I had imagined the best, committed the worst. Was he dreaming too? Was I no more than a mere apparition to him? I was not even that,

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anonymous to him even when he was addressing me, on those few occasions. It is as if, when you retire, you are dead, and the huge birds of prey that haunt the banks of the Ganges float down and rip from your smoldering cadaver the best parts of memory, ripping and rending to get at them.

Thus I evolved my philosophy of life, holding that, if what we pride ourselves on was illusory, then we must try all the harder to achieve an even later illusion with which to end our days: dreaming ourselves, now decrepit, into the most bizarre eminences. If the first illusion got us this far, then the second should see us out. The main thing, I reckoned, is never to trust what you take most pride in. Daydream, and all manner of awful things will scurry toward you.

How I used to caress the ball, that seemingly insensate lump, cooling my forehead with it, scoring my chin with the sharp varnished stitches of the seam. Dear ball, I said, be good to me; do my bidding, so that, when the man with the bat leans to where he thinks you are, you end up an inch away from it, and lo, behold, he is undone. Swoop, I said: swerve, twist, undulate, wiggle, I don't care what you do so long as you don't go straight. Undo them with your paralyzing hum, the flash of a monsoon sunset in your descent. Be devilish. I would sit with the ball cradled in my hands, inert and shiny, and try to tune in to the force and hardness built into it: not to be squeezed out of it, but there at my bidding, awaiting my mischief. Roll it, throw it, bowl it, it always came to rest, tinged with nobility for having been put to such percussive use.

What was the ball's secret? Was it really a comet or an asteroid? Did it have a human side? What did it know about silence? Did it know how silent it was when at rest? I polished and tapped it, making it mine, so much so that, when others used it, flinging it by hand or smacking it with bat, it spurned them as interlopers, knowing the mystery was mine alone. I related it, meaning all balls, to those eccentric longueurs for which the game is famous: when the batsmen are content merely to defend, to stun the ball and make it roll away only

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a yard or two, which used to be called stonewalling. Or when a new batsman takes forever to come in and replace one who is out in one of half a dozen different ways while the crowd turns restive and begins to boo or give the slow hand-clap at the same time as bursting into irritable song: "Why are we waiting, why are we wai-ai-ting?" Or when some fast bowler takes an eternity to walk back to the end of his run-up on a hot, humid day, sniting and hawking up phlegm, the myrrh of exertion. Or, indeed, when someone appears to be out in one of the more dubious ways and the umpire, appealed to, cannot make up his mind, pausing to rehearse in his costive head all the train stations in India beginning with B. Sometimes it takes him an entire minute to make up his mind, only to have the other umpire—since there are always two—come over to confer with him. They disagree, and the whole world comes to a halt, while the possibly outgoing batsman lingers on the grass, a Hamlet up for judgment, and the possibly incoming striker waits at the gate of the pavilion, frozen in mid-stride, half of him walking backward, the other drawn forward into the zone of thrilling action. There he stands, married to a stance, like one struck by impending diarrhea and afraid to move lest his bowels avenge themselves on him in public.

At such times the stillness and silence of the ball become hugely metaphorical. The still ball invites the players to join it in permanently pending pensiveness. The silence, or the hiatus that consecrates it, invites the players to mold their features into a ball-like blank.

In the end, of course, as always in the world of potential action, movement resumes, the batsman goes away or remains, the batsman at the gate retreats or comes out into the open to try his skill, the umpires relax and chuck their pebbles about within a cupped pocketed hand masturbating the thigh beneath the smock. (Some have been known to whiten their smocks with boot-blanch rather than send them to the laundry—something about marring the cloak of authority; where the ball has stained them red or the grass has stained them

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green, the smocks, that is, the umpires keep the smear as a badge of courage, but whited over.)

Play resumes, on whatever fragile basis: the man given out feels he was not out; the bowler denied his victim feels the universe is vile; and the umpire whose opinion the other talked down feels betrayed and will never rise to the occasion again with his old severity. In truth, the game came into being to create competitive silence or thinking as lackadaisical ballistics. There was too much stasis in the world, so we incorporated it into a game. There is plenty of noise in other games or sports, but this is a game for the taciturn, the introverted, the dreamer, the one who ponders amid the violence around him on the greensward. Wonderful to relate, the ball, struck out of the ground like the one in baseball's home run, has to be replaced, and so begins yet another parley, almost a seminar, because the replacement ball must resemble the lost one as closely as possible in shine and wear. So a range of some half dozen candidates appears out of nowhere, and the umpires test these against the memory of a ball now vanished. The entire rigmarole becomes a pact of faith; the lost ball was unique, of course, and so are all these others. Ten minutes for that debate at least, as for the delirious interval when the twelfth man in a team of eleven brings out drinks for all players, or slices of disgusting lemon (I loathe fruit). Sometimes play will stop for a bird or a dog, one wheeling, the other scampering, too near the scene of action; or for a piece of insolent paper doing fluttery reconnaissance of its own. We love having an excuse for stopping: no surprise when you recall that a game can last three days, sometimes five or six.

So, having swallowed a vast lump of time, we give it back to Father in spruced-up gobbets. It is almost as if the game were a form of prayer, not so much asking the deity for anything as pausing to honor being alive, and shoving that recognition next to samples of disciplined action. Active life versus contemplative life, as in the Middle Ages. I once heard some player confide to his colleagues that you could not play the game aright unless you had read most of Balzac. I had not

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realized the game depended so much on realism and I at once interrupted by suggesting the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore instead, or even Tambimuttu. A game full of pools of quietness certainly leaves room for readers pondering their last-night's pages.

Not far from Shimla, in Himachal Pradesh, may be found the highest and most beautiful ground in the world, at seven thousand feet. Players playing at that altitude had constant need of oxygen and could be seen running almost spastic, standing at the sway, executing the most parabolical motions while trying to hit or bowl the ball. There among the pines, the firs, the rhododendrons and the Himalayan oaks, our game at its most stratospheric or hypoxic achieved a degree of unworldliness worthy of that other illusion, the British Raj, whose Shimla was an English town manufactured in India. There were the players slack-legged in their semi-swoons, wailing and giggling, and there were the equally unreal manicured hedges in front of English bungalows and perfect pansy-patches. One can see how lack of oxygen brings originality into a game, just as a touch of home gardening gilds an empire. I myself doted on these bizarre contrasts, always conceding that both game and empire came from the same source.

As may be obvious by now, this competitive career of mine was like going to heaven first and then coming down to earth. Surely a life is better the other way around. I did not choose it, though, but flung my heart and muscles into the game once it had been established that I had the makings of a first-class player, a true professional. How often the perfect combination of eye, limb, heart and lung comes along, I have no idea, but many an inarticulate small boy asks the Almighty for it, hoping to earn his living in the world of play, being paid for what made him ecstatic. Gardeners, glass-blowers, and watchmakers have no doubt felt the same way, though confined to smaller audiences. The lure was that our game gave us a chance to put thousands into ecstasy at the same time as ourselves, so there is a kind of mob altruism to us, a desire to be superlative while showing off. Sometimes, such

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was the delight I felt in doing something well, I decided I no longer needed to look or to try, and then something ridiculous happened, followed by the long ignominious walk back to the pavilion and the platoon of those waiting to bat, or by boos at the bowler who for no good reason had lost all sense of direction. Few misadventures in the game attract more jeers than someone who drops an easy catch, but the biggest jeer comes when someone in the outfield slings the ball to another fielder, who fails to catch it, and off it skims to the other side of the field while the batsmen pick up some easy bonus runs. This we call an overthrow, a noble-sounding word that suggests the posture accompanying an antimonarchical *coup d'état*. No, an overthrow is a careless chuck.

Were I more rational than I am, I would be more certain about when Ranji and I coincided, and how much we had to do with each other, plotting the downfall of famed opponents or who would buy the first drink after the day's play ended. If your mentor happens also to be your idol, your team-mate your guardian angel, your drinking companion your maharajah, your childhood hero your severest critic, you become a little blurred, and delectable mental fodder intoxicates you to an almost unbearable extent. Was there not a Duleep too, cut short from Duleepsinhji, also an excellent batsman, another Cambridge man, perhaps too an absentee ruler? His face does not appear, not like Ranji's, anyway, and his mode of play has faded. He was there, though, chanting and encouraging from wherever he stood, bellowing my name as if its very mention would win the match. "Shushi!" he would cry, "get them out!" Or "Shushi, hit me a six!" Wishful thinking has perhaps made a contributive effigy of him, with Brylcreemed black hair ascending from his forehead in carefully terraced waves, his unkempt mustache adding to his keen and tutored face a raffish look I envied. Whenever we hooted and declaimed the names of visiting Sri Lankans (Singhalese then), he would join in, adding his fruity toot to our more diffident cries. "Athulathmudali! Amirthanayagam!" Their names were too long, which is not to say their performances were short

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or dithery, for they were not. They played like tigers, unfortunately requiring wider scorebooks in which the scorers could write their names without impudent truncations. Either that or a tinier script. If Athulathmudali has just scored over a hundred runs, you can hardly chop him down to Athul', as you might if he has scored none at all—getting a duck as we say or, as the Australians put it, Daddles the Duck. You have to write the batsman's name in the book before he begins to bat; there is no retrospective punishment in our scorebooks. A long name can have a short innings, or a short one a long.

So Duleep', as I called him, was mainly a voice, calling on us to give our best, perhaps abandoned to gasp his last at the highest ground in the world, at Chail, wishing some helicopter would drop him an oxygen tank to keep him going. He is gone, an athletic derelict like so many, though none suffered so much as I, once I got going on the slide from national prowess to middle-aged rot, each temporary successive job a little more degrading than its predecessor. Was there a job, I wondered, one at invincibly low pay, as a predecessor? You predecessed rather than predeceased, though perhaps unable to tell the difference, unable to care. Who can fix the exact priorities afflicting the downward rungs of degradation, all the way from first-class sportsman (or good sport) to inkwell cleaner, with doorman, letter-writer, cow-washer and paper-tearer in between? Only a festering genius could know which job fits between one slightly better and one slightly worse. The more you think about it, the more space opens up into which jobs of loathsome finitude fit exactly. The fabric of down-on-your-luck, as they used to call it, expands like elastic, and new niches appear for new wretches to fit into. If I had known how low I was to fall, I would never have climbed so high; I would have made every effort to duck my head, keep my name out of the news. When asked to bowl, I would have walked away. When awaited at bat, I would have gone for a cider. But you never know. There is no telegram from the deity informing you that your decline will take such and such a form, strive as best you may. We age, we falter, we have

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our keys taken from us and, thenceforth, have to knock on doors.

All this misery was a long way from the sparkling myths of my childhood, when I had warmed to the game through tales told of earlier players, like the batsman whose bat was so broad that, when he came to bat, the fielders held him down while several used a carpenter's plane to narrow it. Then there was Lionel, Lord Tennyson, who scored sixty-three with one arm in a sling. The Reverend Mr. Elisha Fawcett brought the game to the inhabitants of the Admiralty Islands, where eventually his wooden leg was erected on his grave, only to take root and for many years provide wood from which the natives made new bats. And one umpire asked that he be buried in his smock, with all six pebbles in one of the pockets. We would hear such stories and rejoice that they belonged to the game we fancied. Of course, we never expected to be so outlandish as these men, but we prayed that our eventual feats would be worth recording, as things undreamed of in human evolution. Sometimes, looking back from now, I think I first heard about these events from the lips of Ranji in spate, talking loudly in the field in the very presence of the ball, as if my childhood had been transplanted to my young manhood. It was the sort of lore we imagined a high-caste young Indian would learn at Cambridge University while slogging away at something called the Moral Sciences Tripos (essential hurdle for someone destined to go home to India to rule). Sometimes I thought Ranji had given me everything, and not just an approving nod; I wanted that sturdy, imperial connexion with someone athletic and great, much as some want the deity to be sensitive and generous, almost human. You know, though, what they say about deities: once one, always one.

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Katharine Coles

Natural Disasters

for T.P., 1936–1993

1. A mother's lifelong rage. The slow burn
of a wire behind an old house wall, its paper
ornamental to the last, going

sepia before the fire
eats it out from behind.
No ignition:

in the end, at our old tinderbox,
no harm done. The fire truck bellied up,
sirenless, lights pulsing against the night,

and the fireman's industrial flashlight showed the source,
electricity turned to a slow smolder, smoke

we swam through.
In winter's dark, we warmed
our hands before the voluble
flicker of television, which brought disaster

safely into the designated room.
We bought it on purpose, the neighborhood's
oldest house. Walls dried to tinder. Walls at last so thin

one good jolt of earth (the fault
a block above us and poised to go, sometime
in the next millennium) would reduce them.

And then, of course, the mountain
crumbling down. We don't think

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of the inevitable: empire fallen, citizens—
schooled in the way of a city
blazing like heaven's declension—

extinguished at once, our tidy block
reduced to rubble. On the tube,

families huddle in the cold,
their homes burned to ashes, or taken

by hostile forces, by dry rot, by the bank.
If we change the channel, famine burns

another continent's children to the bone.
We opened windows, let out the smoke.
It was as cold as our house would get all year,

though the weather was heavy, record-breaking.
Then we went to bed.

2. Imagine this:
a man with a name requiring of him either
impossible dignity or the world's best sense of humor—

neither of which he's gained by fifty-six—
holds his hand to his heart, its charges

wired brilliantly awry, and falls
to his knees in a parking lot stitched with rain.

The janitor finds him. Too early—five A.M.—,
the hospital a block away sunk into winter half-light,

the ambulance drivers playing a game
of rummy. Someone had a good hand. Too late

the emergency technician's palms pumping down,
electrical paddles to shock the muscle

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back to the rhythms of work, of play.
Half an hour: entropy wins the day.

How much, in America, a white man's life is worth
(the deep south; winter deeply green)—
more than anyone's on earth, and no more—

not even a life spent learning impulsiveness,
mapping tissues, the nervous skin

conducting the charge. He knew that machine.
Knew by heart his family's history.
Died, like everyone, surprised

by the fault ticking inside him. He paid it no mind;
had the words, but refused to name it.
All this, even his name, engraved

on the still electrified hearts of those left behind.
Over coffee, we shake the newspaper:

children, boulders, trucks plucked up, driven
inland by a tide we've ignored,

swelling so far out at sea, traveling,
we thought, to such desolate shores,

nobody paid attention
to the final turn toward our own beaches,
the building force.

3. This couldn't be more personal,
or less so. The new year, 1993.
My mother will live for years,

her anger building like ice
she won't chip away. Her own mother
passed it on, and the world

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collaborated—little endearments,
gestures, the weights of civilization

sticking like burrs around a heart
that will not turn to stone. I harden myself

to feel the ways I'm charmed.
In the yard, three feet of snow and counting:
icicles form on the eaves, blades

drawn toward us by their weight.
Another storm cauterizes our city.
All over the neighborhood, men scale

their houses' ice-glazed pitches, and start to shovel.
Their wives pace the walkways.
But roofs collapse in our best neighborhoods.

Drivers abandon their cars—suburban streets
lost to white, unpastoral meadows—

and forge on foot toward porchlights.
They will be lent the phone, then turned away.
From the whited-out mountains, a herd of elk

drifts toward the valley through a canyon
buried twenty-feet deep in snow. Ghostly

in car headlights, the sensible elk
take the freeway the whole way down.
In the canyon's mouth, the wind

concentrates its rage on them.
Then they shoulder over snowbanks into our yards,
persistent as dream.

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4. Still there when we wake
to heavy skies, another storm barreling in.
They bare their teeth to the trunks

of cherry and dogwood. What we inherit,
too great a tenderness. I planted
those trees myself, but give them up

to watch the elk browsing,
lying in my yard's snow. On days like this

we may not feel luck churning
through us like blood. Look at that sky—

how history carries us here, a current
we're barely aware of. We don't resist

flying at the storm's eye.
This ring of peaks holds danger

back, makes the world peripheral.
But the elk are here. And a fire burns

even under this winter, the dormant garden.
Cows, gravid, sleep in our frozen lilies.
And above us, where the elk will turn

at first thaw, glaciers, traveling so slowly,
push before them mountains, reshaping the earth.

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Three Poems by Kent Gardien

The Belgian Poem

1. After years away I was back in London visiting a friend who lived in Kensington in one of those cheap council flats that in my day poor people like me fought for. He had a few people in; some I knew; some I didn't. They sidled between the furniture and the stacked books. A bitter smell came from marigolds in a vase.

2. I can't record the scene in detail because it's being made up in Brussels by Étienne, who is creating me in a poem written in Flemish. My life unfolds as it occurs to him, and he puts together the setting from literature and from conversations with travelers.

3. An old friend with whom I had fallen out showed up, and it was as though the bad times had never been and as though he had never fattened and had never gone gray. For a while, the party seemed more lively and the gin more effective.

4. I asked him about S, invented on the spot by Étienne. I said I hadn't seen S for years but intended to look him up. My old friend was startled, perplexed. Then I understood: S had died. I started to cry, the grief entirely mine.

5. A man in a white uniform arrived from the National Health Centre for Male Nurses, which my host had telephoned, in search of someone to console me. As the man held me from behind in a slack embrace, the aroma of marigolds seemed stronger. He reached for my hand, and when he squeezed it I noticed that his arm was blackened and was scarred with small emerging words.

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6. I cried for a long time but finally slowly stopped, loosening my grip on the nurse's hand. Because his arm was a prosthesis and he had gone away leaving it with me, it fell to the floor, clattering.

7. In Brussels Étienne relaxes his fingers before taking up the poem in French, and then in English. He's at a table in a restaurant garden, his legs crossing and uncrossing as he leans back from time to time and almost smiles. Near dusk he gets up and pays the bill.

8. On his way to the car he stoops to pick a marigold and puts it in the lapel buttonhole of a blue jacket he wears over his nurse's uniform. He unlocks the Citroën, turns, and lets the keys dangle, tinkling gentle music from his ink-stained hand as he rests his elbow on the roof and stares at the space where he wants me to be, until, like bitter scent made flesh, at last outside the poem, I am.

The Fluffy Doldrums

I found my mother at the closet, her face
Twisted in despair, caught in a private
Misery. "No," she said before I spoke.
"Nothing. It's nothing." There was
Something on the floor inside the closet.
A shadow. "It's nothing," she said, but
Her face spoke a grief. "What?" I said.
"It's dying," she said. She stood in front
Of the door, blocking the closet, but I
Saw it on the floor on its back, fatter
Than a shadow. It had a long snout,
And its eyes were weak, small lights
Of fading sorrow. "It's the third one
To die," she said. "It has the fluffy

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Doldrums." She turned her back to me.
Her hands covered her face, her shoulders
Pulled forward, and her back became herself.

the telephone book

an old telephone book
he's listed in it — father
586 — the old number
303 — father's office

in those days operators answered important questions
operator
where is father?
he's at the barbershop — 437
he's at the domino parlor — 128

a list fell out of the telephone book
father's whorl whirling writing
he has made 999 lines numbered in sequence from 1
numbers
followed by the names of the town's citizens

have you noticed? — I'm not there
this list is an ancient grief
this book is an arid mesa on which
to pitch a tent in times of pillage

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Two Poems by Claire Bateman

Stitching the Bride

I demand a creature of another sex,
but as hideous as myself . . .
—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

And sleepless once when the needle slipped, he could not
say whether it pierced his hand or was at that moment
born from it, stitching
her even through his dreams, the knots
invisible, revelatory: asymmetrical
breasts, knuckles, eyelid flaps with their little fringe,
and she all the while coming nearer,
approaching with incalculable slowness
to join him in the fleshly sampler
where a seam invokes the soul.
He belongs to her.
He is either her mother or her only child.
And the other one peeking hungrily through the lattice
must be her twin, he looks so much like her.
Poised at the point of arrival,
she awaits the galvanic touch
with a formal hesitation the instant before
she will pour herself into the mold shaped for her,
open the eyes from inside—one green, one black—

though he forever howls now,
ripping the tufted hair rich from its yellow scalp
as the head lolls back where the flesh of the throat
should smooth to the clavicle,
splitting the soft mouth just
where she would have entered.

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But she has come so far toward his waiting
she cannot stop:
with no body to rest in, she must expand,
fill the room, knowing her vastness
as beautiful, clear all the way through,
for she will still
be the bride, faithful yet,
she the composition of his weather
and their mutual speed
as he glides on bladed runners
across Gothic ice, pursuing
what has been chasing him for years and is only
nine-tenths of a globe behind,
flying with him through a needle's eye
of absolute cold into adherence: who now is
human, who lost, who the one
without name? He had his favorites though
they never knew. Nothing
you repent of ever repents of you.

Hair

There is a falling of hair, continuous upon the earth.
And the sweepers sweep it away with their long brooms—
away, where mice retrieve it to line their nests,
or it bountifully curls around eyeless Styrofoam skulls,
or is stitched to the sanctified undervests of masochists.
Though bald men pray for miraculous restoration,
though ladies choke back tears as they tip their beauticians,
it fulfills its function through infinite faithlessness.
So if it is true that I must live without you, stranded
here in the land of good behavior, I begrudge my hair nothing,
I send it victorious into the world, even though
you braided it one night with your hands whose touch
I pretend to remember, braided it the whole length,
tight as you could, just to let it go.

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Four Poems by Shawn Sturgeon

Either Ur

Of course, all day long it's Gilgamesh wants
this, Gilgamesh wants *that*, and we scatter
through the city, beating ploughshares into
swords, dyeing bolts of cloth his favorite red.
Oh, we try making our hero happy,
but it's hard acting thrilled as he unveils
his latest victory—to our minds, almost
all two-headed monsters look the same way.
Still, the gods are unreliable, and
our hero is often busy. Sometimes,
he's gone from us for weeks, and we pick up
our usual business—patching up our love
affairs, or inventing better nails. Then,

life seems less circumspect, and we are left
alone to nurse our bruises or mutter
restlessly in the marketplace. Most nights,
we simply sit by the locked city gates,
listening to the winds stir the heavy
grass, as we feel again that singular
urge to rush onto that dark plain, losing
ourselves forever in that startling depth.
True, we keep a firm grip on our seats. In time,
our hero will return home, and then we
will open the gates and venture beyond.
He's princely when he's here, our Gilgamesh,
but soon we will be leaving him for good.

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Happy as Walt Whitman

My ear runs
down my face
like chocolate. Did
you say you love
me? I lick chocolate
all day. When evening comes
I like its look.
I lick the evening, too.
It is the beginning
of my infancy. I taste
pillows, shoes. I tie
objects to my tongue.
They dangle like streamers.
It is a birthday
party! There is chocolate
everywhere. You hide
it in my mouth. I chew,
a rich happiness. You
open your mouth and give
me more. I love
you, I say. You
call your friends
over. I repeat myself.
They pat my head.
You wipe my mouth.

Christ Our Lord

Babbling past one another, it was
difficult making an end to all that
greatness. St. Francis tried, but he spent
most of his time explaining himself to birds.
We had our birds, rocking on the scaffolds,

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our workmen chipping at God, hewing
faces on the towering walls, as the world
grimaced its reply. Some cathedrals took

perhaps a hundred years to construct—
even our wars were shorter—which was bad
for morale, if one considers such things.
It was a rambling sort of monologue,
those aspiring heights. We labored to
explain ourselves to the people. Divine grace?
It is something they know only after
meals. You have heard of the sparrow's fall?
Let us say we counted our eagles more.

The Roman Way

No, our barbarians did not make *us*
wait—in fact, they were a little early,
upsetting our tables before we had
perfected the art of arranging fruit,
adding their gothic horror to our acquired
simplicity. It was a harrowing

experience for all parties involved,
as rising from our couches, from that grace
of a thousand years, we offered them all
they had lacked. Our arts overturned, our now
headless busts, it was all we could do
to keep a stony detachment. If

civilizations are forever falling
we could not have loved our barbarians less.
How excitedly they entered the city,
their eyes turned up, their mouths slung loose, as if
possessing our labors for the first time,
they had understood, at last, our leisure.

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Two Poems by Stephanie Strickland

Iris an Illusion

Consider
    the ink-charged brush
on Wang Wei's scroll, how the stroke that will mean tree
is nothing like the one for river, though all

is smoke here, barely visible
    plumes and patches: carbon particles of ink
bleeding a border, according to competing capillarities
of fiber in the brush,

the paper. Consider
    the stroke, how it is part of the hill, part
of the middle ground on this scroll from *The White Crane*
series, said to be in Wang Wei's style: repetitions

of direction
    —the roof tiles, say, "echoing" branches;
mountain valleys wrinkled, like rock fissure—
angles of juncture at points on the scroll, not themselves

interlocked there, lock inside
    the rapt observer, who gazes not over
but in and out, now seeing, now not,
an arc in the mist

film will capture,
    though we can't. Call
the rainbow *illusion*, then—
but

gasp
    as the huge fish *in one shimmering* bound clears
the vault, eludes
grasp.

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A History of Bearing Greek Gifts

For Briseis

She so overestimates her strength, she plans to come back
from the Camp unscathed—unscathed from rape.
In fact, she is crazed: alone in the fog;

embrace, as she will, she cannot warm
the sword beside him. Needs fur, eiderdown. Found
in bed, aborted. In blood. Beside her,

the bones—and lassitude—of an infant
she can't think how to feed, can't remember
to feed, enough, but then,

who can
give these gifts back: Greek horses—Greek hatred
for strangers? For daughters. Tending

a seashell—not hungry herself,
or so she imagines—to tendrils of vine
she croons, *Though we suck*

now on this gruel
of seafoam and sunlight, it won't always be
so. We're going to

be Animal, I tongue-tip,
I nipple—you,
fontanel.

". . . I shall take the fair-cheeked Briseis,/your prize, I myself going to your shelter, that you may learn well/how much greater I am than you, and another man may shrink back/from likening himself to me . . ."

—Agamemnon to Achilles, *Iliad* I, 184–7

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Two Poems by Jennifer Miller

Blues Song for a Showgirl

for José, 1948–1990

Miranda de la Rosa sang the blues
in crystal ball gowns
held his trophies high because
he was the best.

His nurse would have buried him
spiraled inside a feather boa
wearing a lamé
headdress twice his height.

Her good intentions left him longing
for the arms of a dark and silent man
Miranda de la Rosa lost his shimmy
in these last few months

Together they listened to Lena Horne
as they struggled to get down sips
of thick gray soup, hoping
for one more day

She heard of Puerto Rico
tasted papaya and passion
sucked sugarcane between her teeth,
smelled salt and sand and red crabs washed ashore.

"I will die in the arms of my mother," he told her
though each of them knew
that her young, paid arms
would catch his fall.

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She spoke no Spanish, was often late
and always burned the rice.
She is cleaning out his closet—now—
Finding outfits that a nice girl wouldn't wear.

He is strewn around her on the bedroom floor
in yards of sequined silk and padded bras.
She drags one long black glove
high onto her arm

She plans a trip to see that island
where he'd lived
she plans to see the red crabs
washed ashore

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Bronco Busting

Jimmy was a rodeo-man in high-heeled boots
who tipped ten gallons with a wink, his mustache
not quite concealing two rows of perfect pearls.
These days that hat of his hangs high on the wall
above a photo of brawny blue-jeaned legs
curling round the sinews of a Brahmin bull.
Jimmy was a cowboy who wore beaded shirts
and leather gloves—these days he's growing smaller,

too small for bolo ties, too weak to dress
himself. These days it is his nurse ("you're late!")
who rolls his sleeves, rubs menthol on his chest.
His T-shirt falls around him like a gown.
Singing off-key, she rocks him side to side,
forgets the words (he knows them: Patsy Cline.)
and slips the filthy sheets into a bag.

Once the bed is made she cooks his soup.
"Leave the bone in longer," he commands:
the broth is bland, but he gets it down
and yesterday he gained two pounds. How
they laughed at his prowess—Jimmy could
two-step any pretty boy to bed!

These days she can see the fury
in his eyes when they stop singing.
She dodges fits of rage like no more
than spitwads from a boy. These days
she comes on time. He doesn't care.

She wears her health too well. If
only she could tear off chunks
of breast and thigh and feed him—
if she could feed him her flesh . . .

Jimmy was a cowboy
too small to live;
disappeared
in his
bed.

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Meredith Trede

On Seeing an Ex-Husband on the Cheese Line of the Gourmet Grocery Store

His eyes dart through a physical-asset
inventory; he asks, was I wondering,
as he gestures to the contents of his cart,
about his expanded tastes, apparently
each product reminds him of a country
he and his new wife (she too busy to work
for wages) have seen—and so on and so far
from our first trip to France, then new to travel
though after only one year already old
to each other, to Paris and my falling
in love with and knowing I was loved by
every man I met, anything but myself,
aglow with francomania—then
his tone changes and brings me back to
the surface: as he was saying just now,
am I listening, what have I been doing,
and I hold the high ground, managing not
to brag about myself on the cheese line.

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Leone & Macdonald

d.b.

An Interview and Art Portfolio

During the past six years, the art team of Leone & Macdonald has produced a series of installations that investigate the conceits of language. For "Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down" they filled a box with sand and inscribed on the sand's surface a Braille text containing the names of people lost to AIDS. They made "Private Parts (Sites and Secretions)," a series of branded shorthand drawings, by firing arabesque patterns onto handmade paper, with each pattern representing a "dirty" word in Gregg Shorthand. To make their most recent installation, "Double Foolscap," they transformed their personal wardrobes—pants, shirts, even underwear—into a thousand sheets of blank paper.

Over the course of several hours they spoke with us about art, sex, language and law, as well as The Paris Review*'s history with censorship, among other incidents when authorities tried to ban issue 21 for the line, "'Give her the fucking spike,'" from Alex Trocchi's "Cain's Book." In the course of the conversation the two artists became interested in d.b.s, the dirty books written by the Paris literati (Trocchi among them) in the fifties. The portfolio that follows, a new series of shorthand drawings that they call "d.b.," takes up where the interview leaves off.*

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INTERVIEWER

Tell us about your early work.

MACDONALD

One of our first collaborative installations was a piece conceived as memorial to friends and colleagues we'd lost to AIDS. We built a wooden sandbox, painted it slate black, then filled it with 1500 pounds of sand. On the surface of the sand, we embossed the names of the dead in Braille. Lit from within, the piece read like an aerial view of a ruined city. The paradox, of course, was that the act of reading the names would erase them forever.

LEONE

At the time, we were thinking about the convention of the western memorial and how it functions as a permanent site for collective grieving. We wanted to make a memorial that dealt with the other side of loss, the side that's illegible and ineffable, that can't be read or understood.

MACDONALD

We called the sandbox "Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down," which comes from a nursery rhyme written during the time of plague. "Ring around a rosie" referred to the ring around a lesion and "Pocket full of posie" referred the practice of carrying flowers around to ward off the stench of death.

INTERVIEWER

How did you come to work with shorthand?

LEONE

Much of our work has involved exploring the complexity and duplicity of language. Our strategy, both visual and conceptual, has been to take on linguistic codes, such as Braille, that most viewers recognize but don't understand. By presenting these visually seductive codes in the form of, for example, drawing, painting or sculpture, we ask viewers not only

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to rethink how they read, how they come to know what something means—but also to reimagine the space of conventional art.

MACDONALD

Shorthand entered our vocabulary in a rather unexpected way. I was leaving a medical library on the East Side and discovered an irresistable stack of discarded books on the sidewalk. Rummaging through the pile, I discovered *The Gregg Medical Shorthand Dictionary*. At the time, we were in the very early phase of a new body of work that involved branding and sexuality. I saw the book and knew immediately that it solved the riddle of what to brand. I ran all the way back to the studio to show Hillary.

LEONE

It's true. She did. And she was right about the connection. So I set off for the library to find out more about the history of shorthand. It was one of those moments when I knew why I lived in New York—only here could I find a library dedicated exclusively to shorthand. The history of shorthand is quite remarkable. I'll spare you the long story and just mention some of the more interesting tidbits. Cicero's secretary was one of the first to develop a writing system for recording speech, based on the majuscules or capital letters of the Latin alphabet. By the fourth century, shorthand had become so popular that it was a mandatory skill among the educated classes. Notable among its early practitioners were Julius Caesar and the emperors Augustus and Titus. St. Luke reported the Sermon on the Mount in shorthand, and St. Paul dictated the Epistles to two stenographers. Not suprisingly, over the course of its nearly one-thousand-year history, shorthand was practiced primarily by men. Only in this century has shorthand become associated with women.

MACDONALD

Today, shorthand is the note taking system used by courts to create the official record of any legal proceeding. Although

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the Gregg system itself is rarely used, the law still considers the shorthand transcript to be the true record of what occurred. This struck us as quite amazing given that court reporters are hardly pure mediums through which the truth can pass.

LEONE

And we've all heard the judge's line: "Strike that from the record."

MACDONALD

Shorthand, then, had many contemporary associations for us: as a women's language, a "truth language" and a language of the law. It seemed like the right vehicle for mapping out the intersections of sexuality and the law, which was what we were trying to do.

INTERVIEWER

How did this lead you to the "Private Parts" series?

LEONE

We were interested in juxtaposing different systems of representations, in this case branding, sexuality and shorthand, in order to invent hybrid terms. Branding struck us a compelling metaphor for the often violent, indelible and highly coded way that society marks us as sexual subjects, as gay or straight, male or female. Although today we think of branding in terms of cattle, property, identification, ownership, branding used to be a popular form of corporal punishment. From about the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, people were branded for all kinds of infractions, from hog stealing to heresy. We discovered that local governments used branding to control recidivism among vagrants. In its early history branding was used to mark those on the margins.

MACDONALD

For "Private Parts (Sites and Secretions)," we translated the names of fourteen sexual sites and secretions of the body into

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Gregg shorthand, then forged the terms into branding irons. The edition includes parts like penis, nipple, clitoris and hymen. Since the prints are created by stamping fire-hot branding irons onto textured handmade paper, each is uniquely burned.

LEONE

In other words, no two vaginas are alike.

MACDONALD

The terms of "Private Parts" are so-called dirty words, made unfamiliar by their translation into shorthand. If the very same terms were represented in, say, photographic images or slang language, some might deem them obscene.

LEONE

If you put a Robert Mapplethorpe penis on the wall next to a Leone & Macdonald penis, his might be considered obscene but ours wouldn't, even though both are representations. Neither is real.

MACDONALD

It's been very interesting to watch viewers respond to a particular calligraphic mark as beautiful, then discover it "means" scrotum and have to reconcile their response to the image with their feelings about the word.

INTERVIEWER

Can you tell us about your latest work, "Double Foolscap"?

LEONE

Our recent installation marks a departure for us insofar as we have moved away from specific language codes and focus instead on the potential site of writing: the blank page. The piece really came together for us during a trip to Japan. We

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were staying in a room no bigger than this billiard table, traveling light, feeling free and giddy and unencumbered. As inveterate collectors and savers of stuff, the experience of being without baggage, in all senses, was very liberating. When we got back to New York, we knew it was time to lighten the load.

MACDONALD

We began going through our closets and drawers, retelling the stories our garments contained: an ex-lover's sweatshirt, mom's idea of the perfect outfit for an afternoon wedding, office drag, you name it. So much about identity and performance, so much about our construction as women. Our idea was to make blank paper from the literal fabric of our lives. For us, the blank page held out the promise of new inscription. It was also a wonderful metaphor for the ways in which viewers inscribe onto any work of art their own meaning.

INTERVIEWER

How did you turn your clothes into paper?

MACDONALD

Laboriously. We catalogued each article, cut it into one inch squares, cooked it, soaked it and beat it to a pulp using special paper beaters. We pulled the pulp into sheets that were then pressed, vacuumed and dried. We made about a thousand pages, each measuring 17″ × 27″ and bearing our watermark, which is an image of two female jesters connected at the cap. The image of the double fool functioned as a kind of signature for our collaboration. It was inspired by the fifteenth-century European paper size known as double foolscap.

LEONE

We hung the paper floor to ceiling, creating a monumental grid of contrasting monochromes. The installation also in-

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cluded rather enigmatic portraits of two figures, fools of a kind, frozen in private acts, and a fetishistic catalogue of what remained of our wardrobe: photos, swatches and brand labels. As in all of our installations, the elements didn't add up to mean one thing. Hopefully, what they did do was create a space for narrative possibility. We wanted viewers to enter the piece in whatever way that was meaningful to them, to write their own stories. It's very important to us that our work is accessible on different levels.

MACDONALD

It's also important that what we make works visually, that it stands on its own on a formal and material level, that its form carries the burden of its own meaning. No work should require a handout to be understood.

INTERVIEWER

Did you cut up *all* of your clothes?

MACDONALD

We both got rid of about eighty-five percent of what we owned. I mean, between the two of us, we had fifty pairs of pants. That's revolting.

LEONE

If I'm wearing the same little black dress the next time you see me, you'll understand why.

INTERVIEWER

What inspired the portfolio of images that follows this interview?

MACDONALD

Actually, you did. We had been talking about our obscenity series, "Private Parts," when you began telling us tales about

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sex and literature and censorship. You mentioned d.b.s, dirty books written for a dollar a page by the literary set in Paris in the 50s. And we got excited about "writing" our own d.b., in shorthand of course, based on the history of the period.

INTERVIEWER

Give us some history on the d.b.s.

LEONE

Maurice Girodias, who founded the Olympia Press in the early 1950s, coined the term to describe his line of pornographic books which he called the Traveller Companion Series. Whenever he ran out of money, he wrote blurbs for imaginary books and then came up with tempting titles, like *White Thighs; Scream, My Darling, Scream; The Beaten and the Hungry*. He'd print the list and send it to his clients, who would in turn order books and send money. Girodias advanced the money to his authors, who wrote manuscripts to fit, more or less, the description.

MACDONALD

My understanding is that Girodias had a kind of formula: the books were supposed to be somewhat literary, parodies of pornography, and to contain approximately nine pornographic passages.

LEONE

And it seems like almost everybody in this circle was trying to write a d.b. in the fifties—usually under a pseudonym. For money. For the chance to experiment with language in a shocking way. For the chance to take a chance without risk to reputation. I have to quote Anais Nin here, who gives a wonderful description of the d.b. scene: "The homosexuals wrote as if they were women. The timid ones wrote about orgies. The frigid ones about frenzied fulfillments. The most poetic ones indulged in pure bestiality and the purest ones in perversions. We were haunted by the marvelous tales we could not tell."

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MACDONALD

Girodias was tried repeatedly for publishing obscene books. In fact, the French police watched his publishing activities so closely that he sometimes published the Traveller Companion Series under different imprints, like Obelisk or Ophelia, in order to throw them off the track.

INTERVIEWER

Talk a little about making your shorthand projects site specific to *The Paris Review*.

LEONE

Jennifer and I usually begin a project by imagining our dream house, a space that for us is free of real world constraints, budgetary and otherwise. We proposed a rather ambitious portfolio that, unfortunately, would have been too costly to reproduce. We were told at this point that our project had to be no frills: no special inks, no embossing, no fold out pages. We re-grouped and said, Okay, let's come up with something that will reproduce on this paper, in black ink, at this scale.

MACDONALD

We translated a list of d.b. titles and other resonant phrases into Gregg Shorthand. Using a Japanese brush and sumiye ink, we made page-sized drawings, based loosely on the shorthand forms. In the drawing phase, we completely abandoned the "meanings" of the forms, focusing instead on things visual: line, weight, balance.

LEONE

It wasn't until we edited and sequenced for reproduction that we re-attached the words to the images. Once the words were re-connected to their forms, I read the images, or read *into* the images, very differently, making connections where none had existed before. In this construction, there's something about visual pleasure and sexual pleasure, about the

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promise of meaning, about how we tease with words and images, a come on that's a gap, that, for me, is like pornography.

INTERVIEWER

Would you be able to effect these works if you weren't collaborating?

LEONE

We simmer ideas, toss them back and forth like a ball, sometimes over a two- or three-year period. Our work is absolutely a product of what happens between us, and I don't think either of us could make it alone.

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scream, my darling, scream

by Angela Pearson

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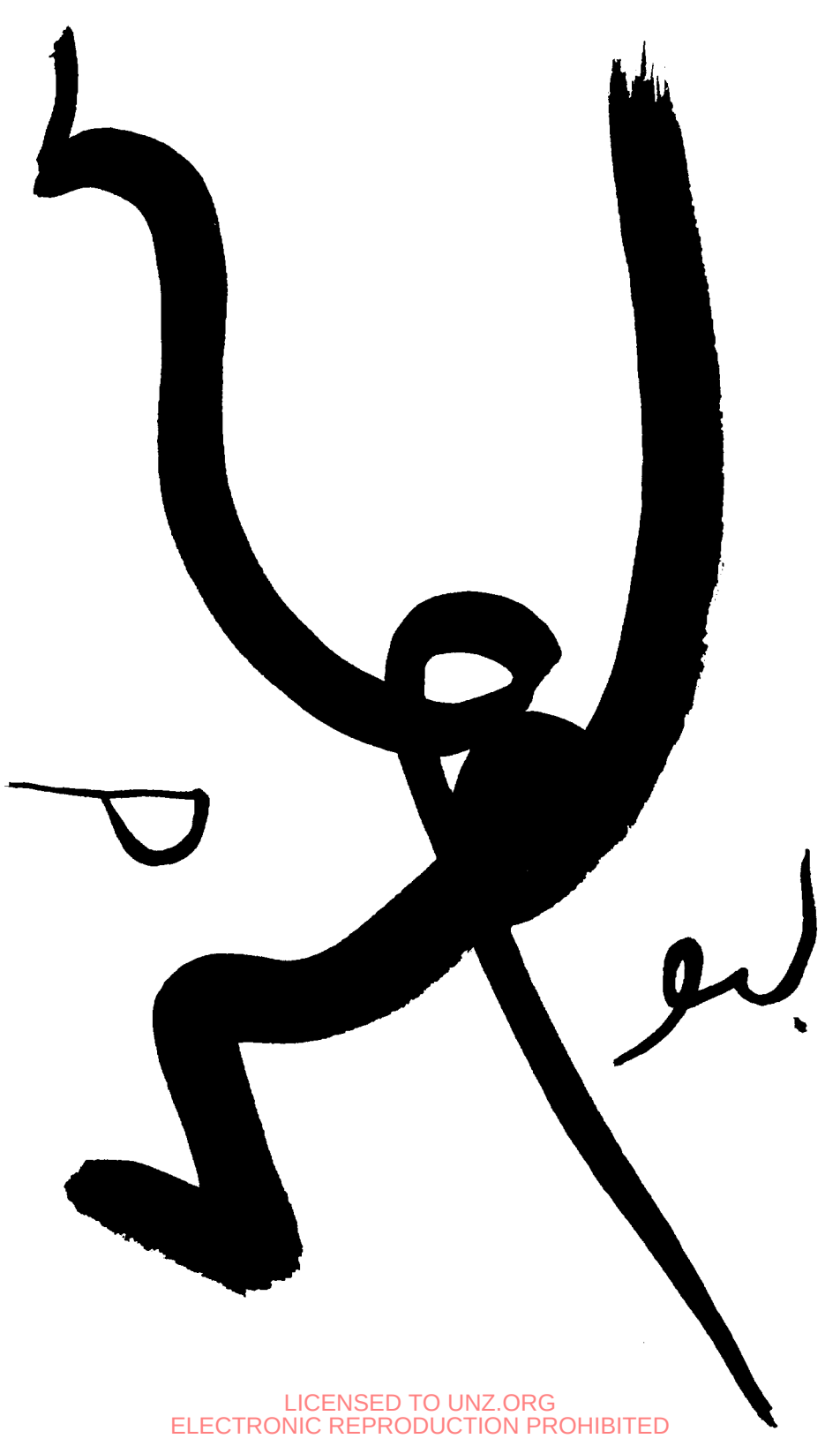

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little birds

by Anais Nin

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obelisk

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candy

by Terry Southern & Mason Hoffenberg

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olympia press

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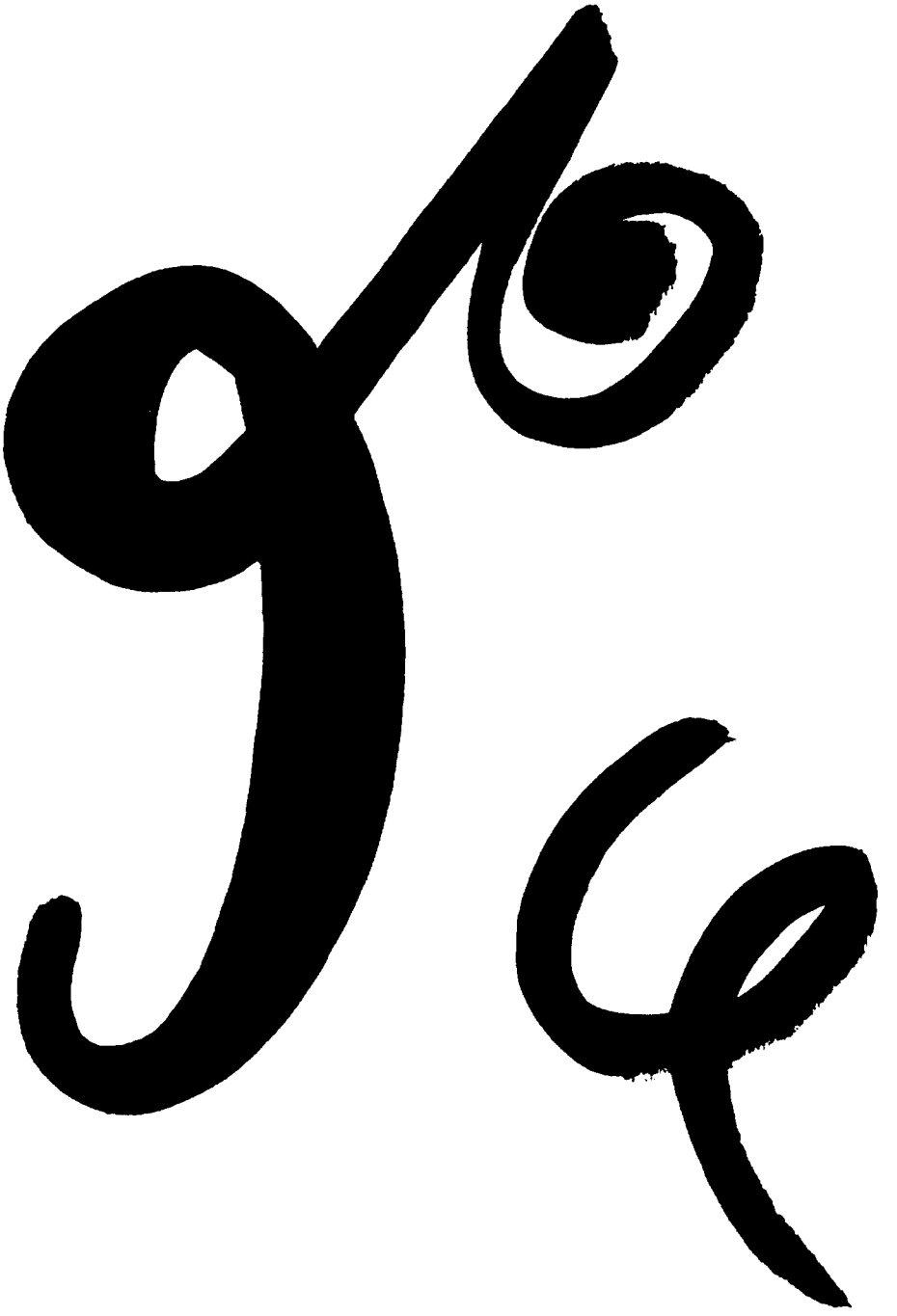

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delta of venus

by Anais Nin

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white thighs

by Alex Trocchi

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the beaten and the hungry

by B. von Soda

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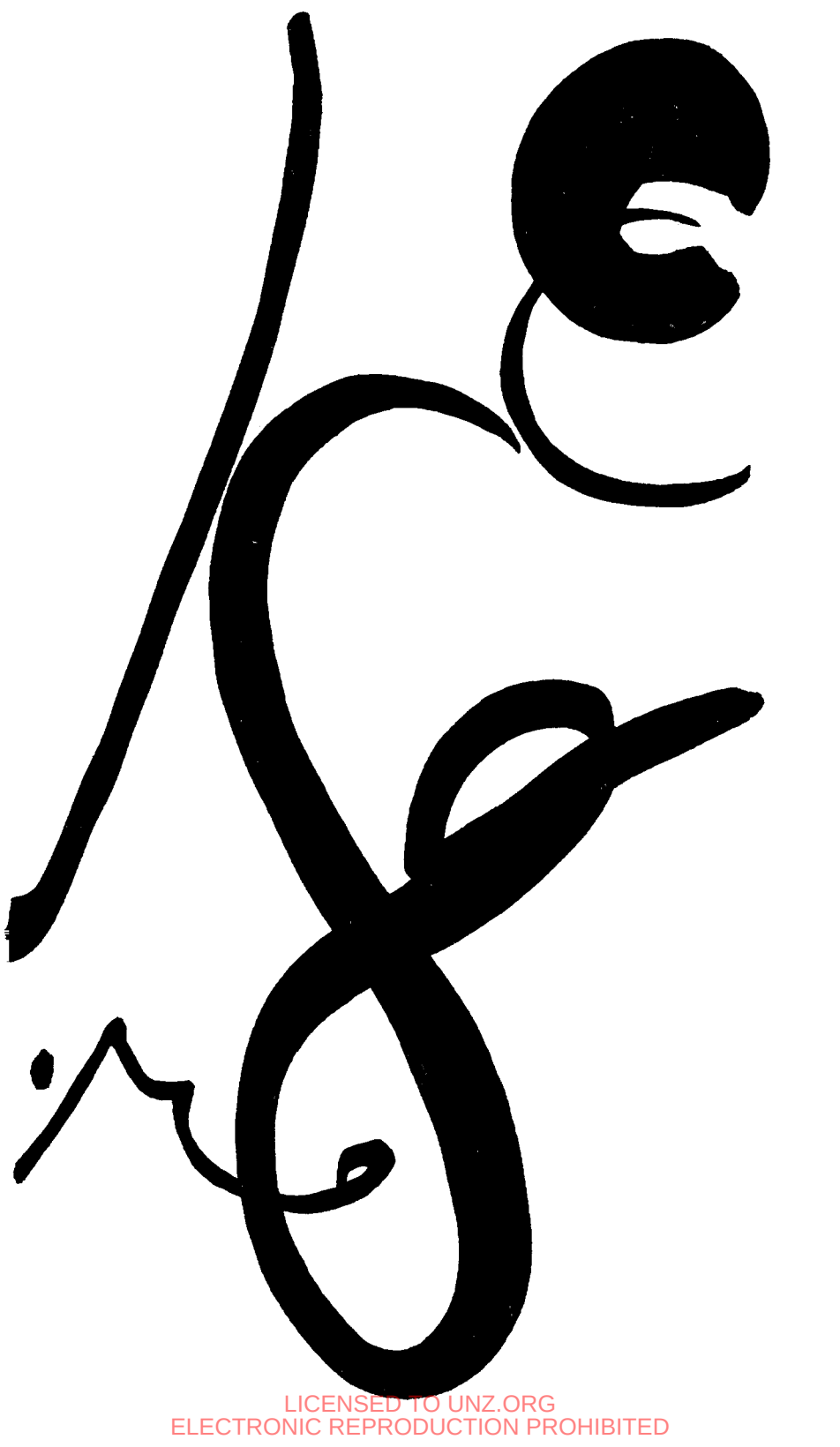

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traveller companion series

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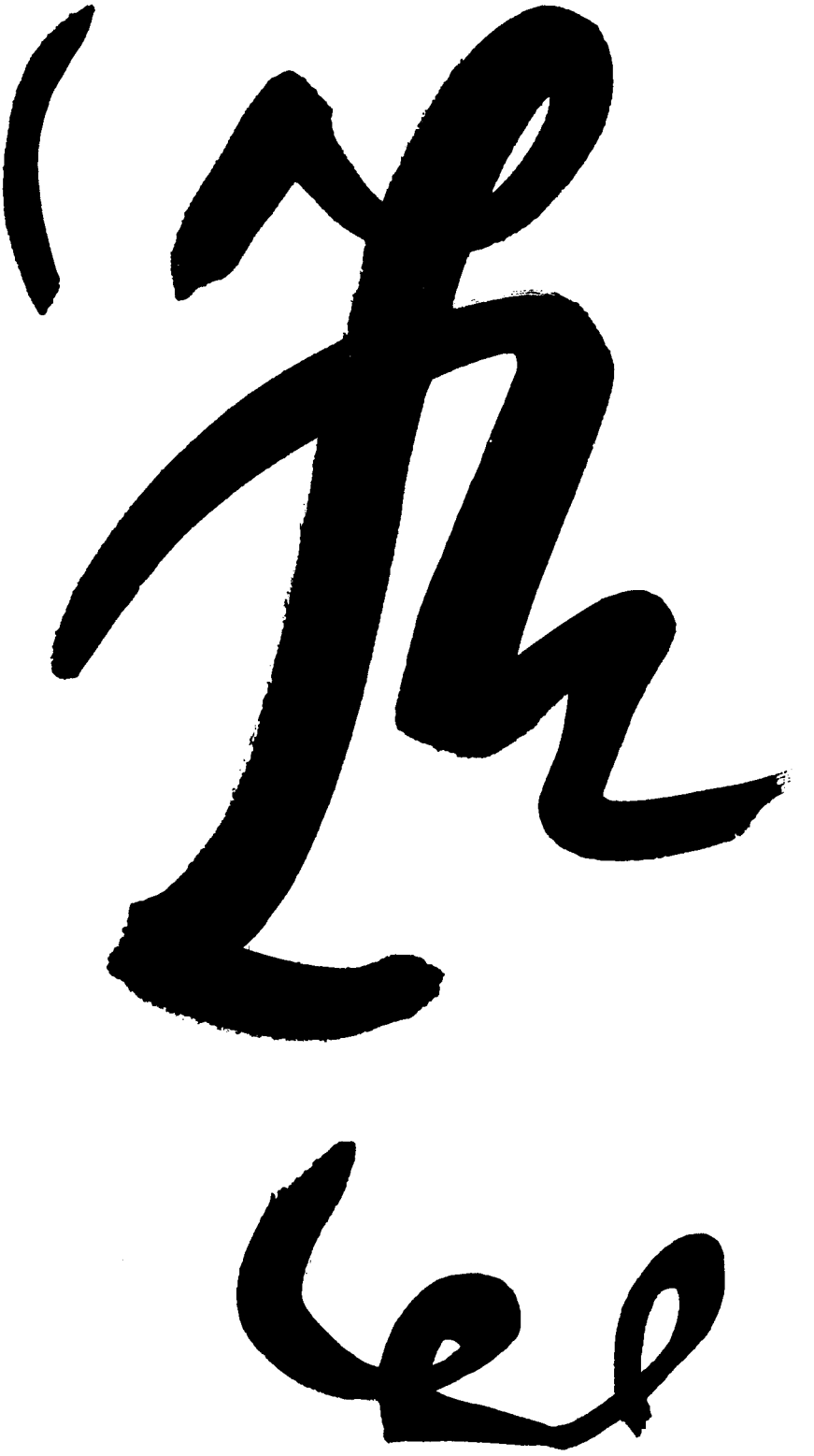

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Necessary Angels

Melanie Rae Thon

Dora's disappeared again. I see her lying in the field, in the abandoned refrigerator. She's not sleeping and she's not dead: she's between these places. And though I'm afraid for her even now, from this distance of years I can tell you Dora Stone is going to live.

The first time it happened, she was five years old, thirty-six pounds. While Mother dozed in the shade of her striped umbrella, Dora wandered up the beach, into the cool waves. She felt sand shifting under her feet, her small body sinking in the tug of an undertow. One man up the shore was close enough to save her. One fat white man burned red seemed to stare. But he didn't come. Was he blind behind his glasses, or was he curious, wanting to see what the child might do?

She wasn't that deep really. She wasn't going to drown. She was her own voice whispering in her own ear, *Just walk out.* Mother found her, safe and dry, so Lily's fury, stripped of fear, was pure, and the slaps were quick and hard, familiar—Dora knew how to let them fall—no crying, no ducking—the sting went away soon enough, and Mommy was sorry in the dark; Mommy came to Dora's room and lay down beside

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her in the blue bed. Mommy cried and held Dora, stroked her precious body, touched arm and neck and thigh as if to be sure the child was all there. She said, *What would Mommy do if she lost you?*

These are the bodies Lily's lost already: the husband with another wife and two sons; the mother shrinking in the bed, wrinkling into the sheets till she was gone; the half-man down the hall, her father, lost; her own unknown self. She's not fat but blurred, lost in her body: drooping breasts and buttocks, spread white belly—lily white Lily Stone—not a flower now though her skin is still petal soft and that pale, that easily bruised—don't touch Mommy too hard, don't hug her too close, but she can touch you where and how she wants, can slap your head on the beach or swat your butt, can come to your room and lie beside you in your little bed, her breath wine sweet, her body a weight and heat that fills your room till you blur too, into her, *precious baby*, the place that is yourself and not yourself has disappeared, but you don't look at her here, and she's come to this room so many times you're not scared—why would you be scared of your own mother who only wants to lie this close? Yes, it's hot, but you're used to that, so you let her sleep and do not tell her of waves or undertow, do not speak of sand, though you feel them in your body now, in your body that remembers everything, the pull and lick, the ground beneath you slipping. You do not speak of the burning man. He's yours. You keep these places to go alone: the water, the blind man's eyes, the stranger's hands.

The next time, Dora's six, tied in the closet, forgotten by twelve-year-old Max, her cousin and best friend, who has used his favorite knot—the Lazarus Loop—so called because a person has roughly the same chance of escaping it as she has of rising from the dead.

It will happen again. Dora's bike is in the reeds by the canal. But eight-year-old Dora is gone. Or she's eleven, drunk on beer with Max who is no longer allowed in their grandfa-

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ther's house. They dance in the back of the truck, radio blaring, doors flung open, yellow light spilling into the swamp. The man in the song says he's a razor he's a rifle he's the water and Max says, *You're dangerous, girl.* Hours later, in the still dark, Dora wakes groggy and mystified on her own front lawn.

In the morning she'll learn of the stolen truck, Max's escape from the Alpena School for Boys, a string of gas stations robbed from Michigan to Florida and one attendant shot in the hand, *So if you know, little girl, you better tell us where.* Armed and dangerous, sweet tender Max, shaved almost bald—Max whose dirty fingers snarled your long hair when he pulled you close—you should have known.

She's seven, she's twelve, she's fourteen, she's gone.

I see a dark-skinned boy on a bike riding toward the refrigerator in the field. He doesn't know what's in it, but he spots the silver bicycle sparkling in the grass. He can't believe what he finds. He's only a child, but he knows she's dangerous to him. He doesn't check for breath or pulse, doesn't lean close to see she's just a girl. He's smart enough not to touch. He flies across the field, pumping harder than he thought he could while the sun blazes and spits in the bleached white sky.

I'm Dora. I'm the girl in the refrigerator. I'm the girl in the closet. I'm the girl who's left her bike in the reeds by the canal. I can't be found.

I know you're afraid of where I'm going when I tell you this. I'm afraid. But I can't stop. Forgetting is the first lie, a little death. I won't abandon myself piece by piece. I know what happens to wicked runaway girls. You find us in rivers of grass, or floating in ponds. You find us under our own beds or stuffed in the hedges of our own yards. You find our shoes in trash heaps. When we surface at last, you give numbers to our bones. But this isn't one of those stories. See, these are my hands. This is my voice talking. As long as you hear me, I'm alive.

One night, my father forgot to come home. Max forgot the boy with the bullet in his palm, forgot a woman pushed from

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her truck to the road. Max says, *I never did nothin' wrong*. My grandfather sits in the wheelchair upstairs, touching his right hand with his left, trying to remember when his body had two sides and the words that might explain. Mother says, *Just a bad dream, baby*.

They leave me to remember it all.

These are the rules: Don't sit in the sun.
Don't ride your bike on the road.
Don't walk by the canal.

Everything here is dangerous: heat, wind, days of rain—this water wants to rise, wants to take back this ground—waves want to splinter boats and wash dark bodies to the shore. Grass cuts your hand if you grab it; leaves tipped with poison pierce your clothes. The alligator in the sun looks harmless as rubber, a truck's blown tire, only the eyes moving, but one flick of the tail and you'll be in the water, your legs broken, your back numb.

But Dora always disobeyed; Dora always walked home along the canal. Even the ducks were fierce. She swatted at them with a stick. One bit her cheek—see, beneath the eye, this white scar.

Grandpa said: *Go get my gun*. He hated the ducks. Their noise. Their shit on his lawn. Dora promised to stay on the road, but he said: *Actions have consequences*. She knows she is the consequence of certain actions for which her mother is to blame. She knows she can't stop him now. This has nothing to do with her, the wound on the cheek, the eye that could have been lost. This is the voice of the gun, the stutter in the brain, the trembling hand, a hurt so old it's hard and small as the bullet in the heart of the gun.

She knows where it is, exactly, where it stands in the closet, propped against the wall—the clean, oiled, loaded rifle. She knows, already, how it feels in her small hands—exactly how long, how smooth. She knows its surprising weight.

Her grandfather once dreamed cities into being—the straight grids of streets, the safe repetition of houses—raised

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them out of wet ground. Now he speaks with a stutter; his walk is a stutter too. He's had one stroke already, will have six more before he dies, so Dora's mother says: *He couldn't have killed the ducks*, but Dora remembers the heavy bodies of birds falling from the sky.

And she remembers the girl. The moon was new, a carved blade slung low at twilight, reflected in water. She wanted to dive through it, into the rippling shadows of palms, wanted to swim away from her grandfather whose hand was hot, whose whole body smelled of the swamp. But she was more afraid of the canal: reeds to wrap ankle and wrist, mud to suck you down.

This is why her grandfather dragged her here. This is what she saw. A pale girl in dark water. Floating. Face down.

Her grandfather squeezes her hand so tight her face goes numb.

This is her proof: her own feet cut by the shells embedded in the road. Fine scars now.

A dream, Mother says. *Yes, a girl did drown, but your grandfather was in a wheelchair by then, so how could he take you to the canal?*

Dora can't ask him. He doesn't know.

She's the only one who remembers how the water looked that night, smooth and slow, its surface tight as skin and just as fragile. How the girl's body seemed not to have fallen. She rose. She broke the skin. She was the white scar on the black surface of memory. Whether she existed or not, she was the place you entered if you wanted to remember it all.

This part Dora doesn't remember—she can't—she wasn't there. So she doesn't know how the boy who found her in the refrigerator told nobody all day, how he hid instead under his own porch, hoping that what he'd seen wasn't real, that he'd wake and forget. His mother stood at the door calling his name. The earth was dark, the sky still blue. The third time, her voice broke him, and the child crawled out.

He talks his way backward till he sees more at dusk than he saw in the scorched field. He knows now she's only a girl,

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very white but burned red, almost blistering, her eyelids—did he come that close?—yes, now he remembers—and her thighs, streaked with dirt—no, not dirt, something dry, rust-colored, flaking off her skin.

His mother is afraid for him in a new way, not afraid as she was when she stood alone and her son was only her voice, an image in her mind, the shape of her lips in the dark—now he's here, with her, in her arms, dirty, whole, but she's afraid because she wonders what they'll think when he tells them, *It's been hours*. She hears herself pleading, *He's only eight years old*. She wants to hide under the porch with him and wait till dawn—she's a mother after all—but she sees the girl, those sore eyes. She believes in grace and knows this child, like hers, might be alive.

Dora doesn't remember how the boy led dogs and men back to the field in the now complete dark, doesn't remember how they questioned him, how they tried to make him conjure somebody else in that field, tried to make him believe that man's face was dark and familiar and this was the reason for his silence.

And she doesn't remember the hands under her, the hands on her chest pumping, the mouth on her mouth breathing, doesn't remember her body lifted to the stretcher, the white ambulance, the mask over nose and mouth, the needle jabbed in the vein and taped to the hand, doesn't remember the long white hall or the cool metal of the scissors cutting her out of her clothes, doesn't remember all the hands on her, where they touched and how.

Remembers only this: waking in the white room and her mother there asleep in the chair beside her, her mother opening her eyes at the same moment Dora opened hers, and in this way she thought her mother must know what had happened but won't say now or ever what it was, will only refer to it in the future as the time Dora rode her bike too long in the sun, the time Dora passed out and nearly died in the heat—and hadn't she been warned?

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She doesn't feel anything inside. Feels only her burned skin. She would tell her mother something if she knew where to start.

Imagine this: another boy, not the one who will find her. None of that has happened yet. This one's no boy really and no stranger. *Lewis Freyer.* Like *prayer*, Dora thinks—when she remembers her hands on him it's that quiet.

Estrelle who is his mother used to come twice a week to clean the house, and Lewis came too sometimes until Estrelle caught them: filthy, together. Now she comes every day to take care of Dora's grandfather. She has a mother of her own at home, an old woman in a chair but not a wheelchair—they don't have money for that—and anyway, Lewis is strong enough to lift her anywhere she needs to go. She was six feet tall, a prison guard, and now she's only four feet long, got one wooden leg and one stump, and if there's any sense in that Estrelle doesn't know. Dora's never seen her, has only heard Estrelle talk. For years Estrelle has walked to and from this house, across fields and roads, a mile and a half each way, but Estrelle's not a young woman, you know, and lately her feet been bothering her, swollen and a bit numb, and this is how her mother's troubles started, so now Lewis brings her in the morning, returns for her in the afternoon.

He's sullen. No matter how hot it is, he stays in the gold Impala. He won't come out for iced tea or lemonade, won't sit in the shade, won't answer Dora when she says, *You're melting, Lewis.*

He sits like a deaf man, refuses to wipe his face though the sweat trickles into ears and eyes, though the salt burns. Yes, he's melting, but he can sit still as plaster and stare through the skinny white girl.

Dora says: *You go too long without blinking, your eyes gonna dry up and fall out of your skull.*

Still, nothing—as if he's forgotten how they crawled through culverts under roads, snagged their clothes on barbed wire, fell down in the field alone.

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He's a grown man, eighteen years old, so he can't remember the weight of her small body on his, her dirty hand over his mouth. Remembers only this: Estrelle in the yard, Estrelle descending: *I'm gonna beat your black skin blue*, remembers that the seven-year-old girl who's now fourteen was the reason for this and other shame.

Silent as he is, Dora persists. It's hot. She's bored. Nobody but Estrelle has come to the house all summer. Nobody but the skittish boy with festering skin who brings groceries and cases of wine to the back door. Nobody but the Haitian gardener with his whirring blades who carves the hedges, trims the lawn, every day. She could ride down the road, swim a hundred laps in a tiny pool while two other girls her age, her friends, lie greased and golden in the blistering sun. But she'd rather wait here, with him.

On the twelfth day, he speaks.

He says, "What the fuck do you want?"

After all her pestering she doesn't know. "Nothing," she says and for three days doesn't go near the car. Then he's the one to tempt her. She's on the porch, and he gets out of the Impala, so she sees him, really, for the first time—a man—thin but hard, all long muscle, dark in the bright sun.

This Lewis, who grins, who says, "I am thirsty," who takes the lemonade in his big hand and drinks it all in one pull, this Lewis who gives her the empty glass, leaves her mute. It's his hands that silence her, the way they flutter like wings opening so she sees the pale undersides marked with fine dark lines. This Lewis who squints, who almost scowls, makes her feel ashamed of her small body. She hears Lily say, *Don't talk to strangers. Don't stand in the sun.* She hears Grandpa: *Go get the gun.* The heavy-bodied birds drop from the sky, and Max whispers, *You're dangerous, girl.* It must be true, because even though she never said a word, Max, her sweetheart, her first love, was caught again.

Lewis says, "You meet me up the road I'll take you for a ride someday." She says she can't, and he laughs but it's mean—he says, "I thought you liked me."

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She thinks of Max in jail, Max blaming her all these years, dangerous eleven-year-old Dora getting him drunk.

She says, "It's not what you think."

Lewis is sliding his long body into the gold Impala; he's closing the door slowly, a deliberate softness, he's whispering his words so she has to lean close; he's saying, *Tell me what I think.*

"Tomorrow," she says. And though she's afraid of what she'll do to him, she can't stop what they've begun.

They make love in her grandfather's car parked in the dark garage. They make love in the gold Impala at the end of a deserted road. They can't be seen together. They know this but never speak of it. They find a refrigerator in a field, a white box, a home, and they lie down but it's much too small. They remember childhood paths through woods and swamp, under barbed wire, over walls. Lewis knows how to come at night into the huge dark house, which door she's left unlocked; he knows how to be a shadow among shadows moving through the long halls, how to breathe as the house breathes, how to find Dora in the blue room in the soft bed, how to slip his hand over her mouth so she won't cry out, how to move like water through her and out of her, how to flow down the dark stairs into the dark yard before gathering himself into the hard shape of a man. *Go get the gun.* There's nobody here to say it now, nobody but the old man with half a face, the old man who can't get out of bed alone, who lies like a bug on his back till morning when Estrelle comes. There's nobody here but the mother fallen across the couch, snoring in wine-thick sleep. Nobody here but little Dora in the damp bed.

Tonight he lifted his grandmother, carried her from the chair where she sits all day to the couch where she sleeps. Even without her legs she's a big woman, heavy. She never leaves this house, but she sees far beyond these walls. She feels the heat of the boy's skin where he touches. She knows. She says, *You watch yourself, Lewis.* She says, *Your mama's had all the sorrow she can bear.*

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He would never tell Dora, would never name his mother's grief, would never describe the three rooms where he lives with her and her mother and two sisters, the kitchen table where he and his sisters and brother were born, would never try to explain what it means to be the youngest child of seven and the only man in the house.

But somehow she knows. She imagines the old woman in his arms, knows that despite her losses she weighs more than Dora ever will, that this weight is a thing he carries every time he climbs the stairs of her house.

He does not find her pretty in any way. She has a flat butt, barely swollen breasts. The thick blue veins roping her thin arms seem unnatural on a girl so small. Her blond hair is clipped short, dyed black, but comes in yellow at the roots. In any light she looks too naked, not just stripped but skinned.

He's had girls before. Women he calls them. They knew what to do. They had red mouths, quick hands. They were never this naked. They were wet and open, their bodies full and safe and soft. They had rubbers in their purses. He could meet them anywhere, any time. No one had to lie.

He and Dora never talk. They know everything and nothing; they're bound: his mother combs her grandfather's hair, clips his nails, wipes his bum. She's more than wife or daughter ever was. What the old man feels for Estrelle is his secret but will never be as fragile or forgettable as love.

The blue car.

The stifling heat of the garage.

He says, "Does it scare you?"

She knows he means his body, how long it is, how dark, and she thinks of her mother climbing out of the tub, all that flush rushing toward her, loose breasts flapping, dimpled thighs whispering where they rub—she thinks of her grandfather grabbing with his one good hand, the thumbprint of bruise he leaves—she thinks of the cheek she's supposed to kiss, the rough white-whiskered skin—she imagines these familiar bodies, how they make her forget what's her and not her, how she's terrified of the place they blur.

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Where Lewis touches, he defines—dark hand on white rib. So she's not afraid. But he is—afraid of these frail ribs. He can rest his long fingers in the spaces between them—she's that thin, and her skin too, so fine he feels he might put his hand through her. He would not say he loves her or even likes her. If he could explain it at all, he might say it is this fear that makes him tender, this fear that brings him to the house again and again—he sees her brittle ribs as the rigging of a tiny boat rocking on black water; it is this sound, waves lapping wood, that calls him. Small and breakable as the girl is, the body he enters is a way out.

Tonight Dora's grandfather could not be comforted. He rolled around and around the room, using his cane to move the chair with his strong left hand. He dumped the drawers, looking for something that can't be found. He refused to understand who Lily was, and finally she left him, locked him in the room so he wouldn't propel himself down the hall, so he wouldn't fly down the stairs. He banged the wheels of his chair against the door. He rattled the knob. When his yell broke to a whimper, it was Estrelle's name he called.

Dora tells Lewis none of this. She wants to be her body only, her body in the car, in the rain, out here on the black road. But her body is a map. Her body is a history. His fingers find every scar and bruise. *What happened here, and here?* He doesn't ask, but where he touches she remembers. She cries, and he holds her. He expects no explanation. He isn't scared of sorrow. It doesn't surprise him. When he's calmed her, he touches her again.

She imagines her grandfather upstairs in the house far from this road. He's rolled his chair close to the window. He's trying to see through the rain, trying to remember his right shoulder, how the raised rifle kicked as he fired. He's trying to count the ducks falling from the sky but there are too many—they always come too fast—and then he sees, he understands this one thing: it's only the rain.

She imagines Lewis's grandmother—one stump, one wooden

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leg—Lewis is touching her legs, and she sees her own future, her body coming apart, how she'll lose it piece by piece. She doesn't know how he does this to her, why he won't stop. They make love so many times, so long, her fingers and feet and lips go numb.

They will be caught. It's necessary. They know this as they know each other: without words. They are waiting in their silence to see how it will happen.

The gold Impala, empty.

A dirt road.

Tonight they saw the pretty little horses, the setting sun.

Four ponies, lean and glowing in the gold light. One deep ginger with hair like velvet. One the bleached white of bone. Two bays nuzzling. They heard the hum of insect wings, saw the ginger pony brace his legs to piss hard.

Later, they stood on a bridge, watching gulls swoop high then dive toward water, saw them vanish at the surface as if a blue hole opened between air and river.

Tonight when they lay down in the woods where palm and pine grow together, they touched each other's bones: hips, cheeks, spine. Tonight, for the first time, they closed their eyes and almost slept, the man enfolding the child, one bird fallen—her body the white belly, his the dark wings—and it is in this way they wake to the sound of glass shattering on the road.

It's only boys, three of them, nine or ten years old.

They beat the car with sticks and rocks. Lewis knows that if he closes his eyes once for just one second the bare-chested boys with sticks will become men with guns. He lies naked, watching children destroy the car. His hand clamps Dora's mouth, and she wonders: Does he think I'm fool enough to yell? It's not that simple, his fear. What he wants is for the body beneath his body to be gone. But her body insists. Still as it is, it is too many sharp bones. It will not soften, will not be hidden, will not sink into this ground. The boys jab their

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little knives into tires; the air escaping hisses off the road. His body hot on top of hers has a smell of something smoldering, about to burn, and then the match is struck, the first one, and the vinyl seats are split open with the sharp knives and the stuffing spills out—the first match is thrown and the second match is struck and the smell in the night is melting plastic. Together, two boys stand on the hood to drop a rock onto the windshield and the glass is a shattered web caved in that does not break apart. Black smoke billows from open doors. The man in the woods has pressed the air from the girl's lungs, and the boys who are thrilled with their miraculous destruction are mounting their bikes and peddling home.

He is off her and she gulps air. He hates the boys, their bare white skin, their whoops and their strange silence in the end—but they're gone, so it's only the girl beside him now, silent but for her gasping, and he hates that sound, and he hates her bright reflecting skin—he can't see his own hand at the end of his own arm.

He wants her dressed, and she knows; she's quick. He wants to leave her or be able to love her despite everything. But he can't escape the smell of fear strong as piss rising from his skin. He can't escape the rage, a shaking too deep to stop, blood quivering in the vein. He wants to weep, thinking of his mother in the morning, walking to this girl's house.

There's nothing to do but let the car burn. The sky's gone green with clouds. If the storm comes soon enough, if the rain's hard, these flames might flicker out.

They walk together partway and then alone. They do not touch or speak. They do not look over their shoulders. They do not look up and hope.

When he disappears, he disappears completely, moving across the field silent and invisible as the black canal. She thinks he is gone forever. She leaves no door unlocked. But that night he comes again.

He's green sky and wind. He swirls up from the south.

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He's the screen door flapping, a splatter of rain on the roof—he's the pavement that seems to melt and flow; he's the drone of pumps. He's all sound.

He's the stone hitting the glass of her window—he's a second stone and then a fistful sharper than rain she can't ignore.

She's afraid of him but more afraid for him, his new recklessness and what would happen if her mother woke and made one call? What would anyone see here but a dark-skinned man at a white girl's door? So she's opening the window, letting the rain pour in—she's speaking his name into the wind and he hears her—she's moving down the stairs to open the door so carefully locked.

He's inside, he's there, filling the doorway, dripping, dark, his clothes drenched, his skin wet, his hair full of rain. Water flows from him, puddles on the floor; muddy rivulets stream across the tile, and Dora thinks of Estrelle on her hands and knees tomorrow, Estrelle not asking, not her business what the white people do in their own house, just her business to make it right when they stop.

She's wearing a long T-shirt, her underpants. Nothing else. She's cold. But it's not cold. Her shaking is a spasm now, in her chest and knees. She leans against the door so she won't fall. She says, *Why are you here?* He moves close and she smells his breath and body, the burn of adrenaline, the acid rising in his throat. He grabs her wrist, pulls up his wet shirt to press her palm to his stomach. *Can you feel it?* he says. He means the quivering, the blood jumping under the skin—he believes she'll know. But she doesn't know.

He says, *I have to lie down.*

She thinks he wants to hurt her still. His body's hard against her—belly, hip, hand—hard. His fingers twist her hair and pull. She remembers the weight of him in the woods. He squeezes her bare arm, says again: *I have to lie down.* He says, *I want this to stop.*

He's following her up the stairs. He's leaving his muddy tracks through her house but he doesn't care—it's the last time—he's not coming back—so what if the doors are chained

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and bolted after this, what if there are big-headed dogs in the yard after this, what if the girl is slapped and questioned till she spits out a lie or the ridiculous, unbelievable truth, what does he care?

In the blue room, on the blue bed, he strokes her body through the shirt; he strokes her bare thighs. She wants him to hate her. She wants him to do this and be gone—she wants to lie on the bed alone while the wind tears the palms out of the ground, while the rain blown sideways batters the house—she wants nothing left of him but the damp place where he lay in his wet clothes. She wants him not to kiss, not to touch her face, not to put his fingers in her mouth; she wants him not naked, only unzipped—quick, hard—she wants to hate him and be hurt and be done. She wants him not to speak ever again. She wants not to feel the short blades, not to hear the hiss of air, not to smell the vinyl melting on his skin.

But he is naked. He's pulled the T-shirt over her head. He's pulled the panties down to her ankles. She's small in this room, in this bed, a child in this house, herself and not herself—she's letting him touch her, everywhere—he's inside her, everywhere, and it's wrong, she knows, to want him and be this scared. She thinks of the grandfather down the hall, wide-eyed and helpless in his bed. She imagines he knows everything and wants to come but can't come. She imagines him weeping, longing to put his big hands on the smooth gun. And the man in this bed is kissing her eyelids. His long fingers are in her mouth. She's terrified, and he knows and he holds her head in both hands and he moves so slowly, and his lips are almost touching hers when he whispers, *Baby*, *no*, and she sees she's herself again, not blurred with the boys on the road; she's his lover, and that's what breaks her and breaks him, because they see the muddy tracks through this house, because they can follow those footsteps back along a muddy road to a place where a gold car exploded hours ago and is burning still—it's a fire the rain can't put out.

He wants to go. He's pulling on his wet clothes. She knows

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how it ends here. He won't risk this again, for her. The boys in their bright skin will dance around this bed forever. The gold flames will rise forever from the road.

He's his own footprints wiped from the stairs. He's the rose splattered bedspread washed and dried. He's the faint outline only she can find.

But it's not over.

It's just begun.

Hard as he tries to go, there's no way out of her. Not long now till she'll know. First the swelling. Then the sickness and no blood. *Actions have consequences*. Your grandfather can't say it now, but it doesn't matter: you know who can't help you, who can't be called. And the consequence of no action is to understand what you'll do alone.

It's easy to steal what you need. You don't ask yourself what's right. You think of boys with sticks and Max in jail, how dangerous you are, rocks thrown at your window, a wet man who flows through you: first rain, then fire. You imagine your life forever in this house.

There's cash in Lily's purse, wads of it, uncounted—for Estrelle and the gardener, for any shy boy who might bring wine to the back door. You know how much to take each week for four weeks. You know how soon and where to go. Seven miles. It's not that far. You ride your bike. You don't think what you'll do after. *After* is another country, a place you can't know.

The woman at the desk says, *How will you get home?* And Dora says her boyfriend will come; she says he's got a car and all she has to do is call, and the woman Dora won't remember says that's fine, but we can't let you go till somebody comes and Dora nods, of course, somebody will come.

There's the finger to be pricked and one drop of blood. There's a movie and a clever girl who shows you the pink model of your uterus, who explains what she calls *the procedure*. There's the yellow pill to calm you and seven colored birds hanging from the ceiling, twisting on their strings over the table. There's the clever girl in green scrubs now, offering

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two fingers for you to grip. She says, *You can't hurt me*. And the doctor comes in his white mask. He's a face you won't know and don't want to know, and he says, *You're a little one*; he's already between your legs, so you're not sure what he means, but you can squeeze too hard, and the girl says, *Let go*. The sound is water in a vacuum. The paper birds spin. The curved blade is quick, and the doctor says, *That's all*.

In a room with tiny windows too high there are eleven beds; you are number eight. You eat cookies, drink juice—obedient Dora, you hold out your arm, let one more woman in green take the pressure of your blood, 90 over 60, a lie, what could they know about your blood? A third woman tells you to rest now, just for an hour, don't move—here's a pad, your underwear, call me if there's too much blood.

How much is too much?

How many times do the little boys jab their knives into soft tires?

How many matches make a car explode?

She's too weak to do what she needs to do. She drifts and wakes. A woman's whispering, *We've got a bleeder*. Dora hopes it's not her. She feels the stabbing from inside, the doctor again, the bright boys. It could be her. She checks her underwear, sees the black clots, the thin red streaks—not too much—there's so much more blood in a body than this—and the woman who is the bleeder is screaming now, feeling the blood beneath her, slippery, the blood, and the three women in green hold her down.

Dora sees and takes her one chance, gathers her clothes in a ball, slips from the bed and out the door.

In the bathroom she wads the paper gown in the trash with the soaked pad. She stuffs paper towels in her underpants. She doesn't look. What good would it do to know? Her shoes are in the other room where the woman has stopped wailing.

The window here is wide enough, and Dora Stone is gone.

I see her on the road, riding. I know it's true but still don't quite believe she's doing this. She's dizzy. She can't sit down.

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The air rises in waves off the pavement. It's not the heat but the light she can't bear. She weaves and cars honk, but nobody stops and the sound of horns is a distant sound to her, from her life, before. She can't see anything except her own hands on the bike, gleaming metal and the road moving under her. She means to go home, but it's too far, and she goes to the field instead, lies in the refrigerator instead, and this is where the things she can't remember begin:

the boy on the bike
the mother on the porch
the dogs in the dark
their smell, her smell
and then the men
the needle, the mask, the scissors

gliding along her skin.

This is where you wake in a white room. This is where the mother, your mother, opens her eyes at exactly the same moment you open yours.

You do not think of God or mercy. You think of water, cows and trailers swirling across flooded lawns; you think of wind, the furious swaying heads of palms in the moments before they fall; you think of your grandfather's cities, the ones he built and can't remember now, the cities where streets flow with mud and hail, rivers of forgetfulness, and the roofless identical houses split open, walls and rafters splinter on the ground; you think of boats, their crammed cargo, arms and legs dangling over rails, torsos twisting, all those dark bodies straining toward this shore.

Now it's the blue room at night, and Estrelle stands in the corner, and Dora thinks she should have gone home hours ago, and why does she stand there, and Estrelle says, *Don't you ever tell.*

She thinks he comes again. She thinks he's a scatter of stones, but it's only rain. She thinks he must know what's happened to her body, how she's forever changed. But only Estrelle comes, only Estrelle speaks, *Boys like mine still rising out of the swamps because of ignorant girls like you.*

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He who's touched her everywhere, who touches her now, who's asked with his silent hands what happened here and here—green bruise, white scar—he who's seen her body in every light, touched her body in every dark place, whose fingers brush her lips like moth wings, he never comes.

He's lying in his bed and she can't believe he doesn't feel the hard table beneath them, doesn't see the paper birds, doesn't ride and ride and then lie down forever in the white box, doesn't lie down to burn in the field with her.

It's September. Dora Stone is still fourteen, starting ninth grade. She trims the dark ends of her hair, lets it grow back blond. She visits friends. She swims in tiny turquoise pools. She drinks rum and orange juice like the other girls. A glass shatters on concrete. She laughs at her own stupid hands, her own foot bleeding.

Dora's sixteen, and Estrelle's in the kitchen crying, saying her poor mama's dead at last and Lewis going to be married next week, moving north with his pretty wife, baby coming a little bit soon but not too soon, and Lewis gonna get that training, be an EMT like he always wanted. *Did he?* Dora doesn't know. Think of it, her boy, saving lives every night, and yes she's worried and yes she'll miss him but mostly she's proud. Estrelle's in the blue room in the middle of the night. She's got her hand over Dora's mouth. Grandfather's had the seventh stroke. The wind blows the curtains over the bed; the woman's gone.

There's a man on the television. Mugged having a heart attack. Detroit. *Lewis, is this where you are?* Revived by an off-duty EMT. *Did you save him? Did you rip his shirt, put your hands on his chest, your mouth on his mouth?*

Dora's twenty. She lives alone, has left her mother forty miles north in the big house, alone. She has a job.

Collecting urine.

Taking blood.

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Everybody in this city is terrified: the men with big veins, the women with no hair, the little girls pissing in jars. Nobody wants to find out. She knows what to do. She knows how scared they are, that later, when they know for sure, they'll be hurt all the time. So she's careful with the needle and the rubber hose. She doesn't want to hurt them now.

She's had lovers, a string of them, a parade—the serial lovers, she calls them, one after another. She's dangerous still—this body, this skin, this blood—*don't touch me if you don't want to know*. But they do touch. They come and go. They pass through her and under her. They pin her down.

Sometimes she thinks he'll come the way the others come. They're muddied reflections in black water—they're imprints in white sand—they're mouths opening in the rain—her lovers—they're a line of men in white masks and white gowns—they're the wrinkled sheets—they're naked boys. They want her to lie down.

He thinks he was the one in danger. You could argue with him now. You could show him your rubber gloves, the vials of blood, the spit in the sink, the warm yellow fluid trembling in the glistening jars. You could tell him how careful you are at work, how careless at home. You could tell him how it felt on the hard table, on the long ride, in the refrigerator, in the dark room, how it was through the days of silence that followed and now through the years of fear when you think this will happen again and again—to your body alone—this will keep happening until one day, one day you really will be gone. You could tell him how terrifying it is to live in your bright skin. You could make him touch the place it still burns. You could touch him. You could open his veins. You could drink his blood. You could tell him the one thing that matters now: *Listen, it won't be that long—unknown and unforgiven as I am, I want to live in my body somehow*. You could ask him who he saved tonight. You could make him tell you what he sees when he closes his eyes and the heart beneath his hands starts to beat again.

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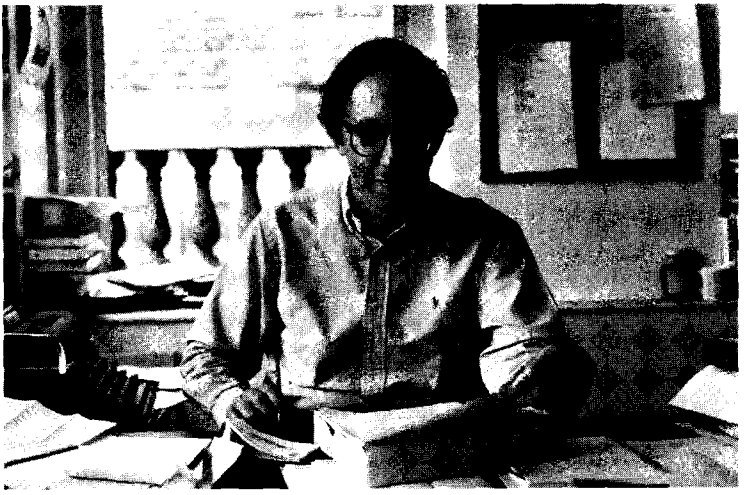
Robert Gottlieb

The Art of Editing I



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Robert Gottlieb is a man of eclectic tastes, and it is difficult to make generalizations about the authors he has worked with or the hundreds of books he has edited. In his years at Simon & Schuster, where he became editor in chief, and as publisher and editor in chief of Knopf, he edited a number of big best-sellers, such as Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death, *Robert Crichton's* The Secret of Santa Vittoria, *Charles Portis's* True Grit, *Thomas Tryon's* The Other, *and Nora Ephron's* Heartburn. *He worked on several personal histories, such as Brooke Hayward's* Haywire, *Barbara Goldsmith's* Little Gloria . . . Happy at Last, *Jean Stein and George Plimpton's* Edie:

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An American Biography *and the autobiographies of Diana Vreeland, Gloria Vanderbilt and Irene Selznick. He has edited historians and biographers including Barbara Tuchman, Antonia Fraser, Robert K. Massie and Antony Lukas; dance books by Margot Fonteyn, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Natalia Makarova, Paul Taylor and Lincoln Kirstein; fiction writers such as John Cheever, Salman Rushdie, John Gardner, Len Deighton, Sybille Bedford, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Ray Bradbury, Elia Kazan, Margaret Drabble, Richard Adams, V.S. Naipaul and Edna O'Brien; Hollywood figures Lauren Bacall, Liv Ullmann, Sidney Poitier and Myrna Loy; musicians John Lennon, Paul Simon and Bob Dylan; and thinkers such as Bruno Bettelheim, B.F. Skinner, Janet Malcolm and Carl Schorske. He has helped to shape some of the most influential books of the last fifty years, but nonetheless finds it difficult to understand why anyone would be interested in the nitpicky complaints, the fights over punctuation, the informal therapy and the reading and re-reading of manuscripts that make up his professional life.*

Gottlieb was born in New York City in 1931 and grew up in Manhattan. He read "Henry James, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Proust—the great moralists of the novel. Of course," he says, "I admired the Russians tremendously, but I didn't feel that I'd learned anything from them personally. I learned how to behave from Emma *—not from* The Brothers Karamazov." *He graduated from Columbia in 1952, the year his first son was born. (He has since had two more children with his second wife, actress Maria Tucci.) He spent two years studying at Cambridge and then in 1955 got a job at Simon & Schuster as editorial assistant to Jack Goodman, the editor in chief.*

Publishing was a very different business in the fifties. Many of the big houses were still owned by their founders—Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer owned Random House; Alfred Knopf owned Knopf; Dick Simon and Max Schuster were still at Simon & Schuster. As a result, publishers were frequently willing and able to lose money publishing books they liked, and tended to foster a sense that theirs were houses with missions more lofty than profit. "It is not a happy business now,"

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says Gottlieb, "and it once was. It was smaller. The stakes were lower. It was a less sophisticated world."

In 1957, Jack Goodman unexpectedly died, and at about the same time, Simon & Schuster was sold back by the Marshall Field estate to two of its original owners, Max Schuster and Leon Shimkin. Schuster and Shimkin didn't get along, things became strained, and within a few months most of the senior staff had left the company. The owners neglected to hire anybody new, and so suddenly, as Gottlieb puts it, "the kids were running the store." Within a few years Gottlieb became managing editor, and a few years after that, editor in chief. Then, in 1968, he left Simon & Schuster to become editor in chief and publisher of Knopf.

Next to reading, Gottlieb's grand passion is ballet, and from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, while at Knopf, Gottlieb served on the New York City Ballet's board of directors, in which capacity he organized ballets from the company's repertoire into programs for each season and oversaw its advertising and subscription campaigns. (A third, lesser, passion of Gottlieb's is acquiring odd objects—including vintage plastic handbags, of which he has a notorious collection.)

In 1987, at the invitation of its new owner, S. I. Newhouse (who also owns Knopf), Gottlieb left Knopf to take over The New Yorker. *The announcement of his appointment was received with undisguised hostility by the magazine's staff, who suspected Newhouse had ousted Gottlieb's predecessor, the venerated William Shawn, editor since 1952, against his will. Dozens of the magazine's staff members signed a petition requesting that Gottlieb refuse Newhouse's offer. He didn't. "I never took it personally," Gottlieb explains. "I knew that the same thing would have happened to anyone. I didn't even read the names of the people who signed the letter, many of whom were good friends of mine. I knew that I felt a lot of goodwill toward the magazine, and I assumed that it would prevail. And, indeed, once I got there, everyone was wonderful, couldn't have been nicer. I just got to work, and everybody got to work with me."*

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In 1992, Gottlieb agreed to retire from The New Yorker *to make way for former* Vanity Fair *editor Tina Brown. (He says he told Newhouse when he was hired that he would be a curator rather than a revolutionary, and that if Newhouse wanted radical change he should find someone else.) Then sixty-one, Gottlieb decided he didn't want to begin running something else, and offered his services to Sonny Mehta, who had taken over Knopf when Gottlieb left. Since then, Gottlieb has been working gratis for Knopf (he received a large settlement from Newhouse when he left* The New Yorker*) on books like John le Carré's* The Night Manager, *Katharine Graham's autobiography, Mordecai Richler's forthcoming book on Israel, Arlene Croce's study of Balanchine, David Thomson's biographical dictionary of the cinema, Eve Arnold's retrospective and various* New Yorker *cartoon books.*

My interviews with Gottlieb, who looks something like a taller and less rufous version of Woody Allen, took place in the living room of his townhouse on East Forty-eighth Street—two blocks from the Knopf offices on Fiftieth, and half a mile from The New Yorker *on West Forty-third. His living room overlooks the Turtle Bay Gardens—a rather formal private park that combines what would be the backyards of the houses on that block between Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Streets. From the window Gottlieb pointed out Katharine Hepburn's house across the way (he was her editor at Knopf) and the garden patio where Janet Malcolm had one of her famous lunches with Jeffrey Masson.*

The interviewees in this piece were suggested by Gottlieb himself. Their comments and Gottlieb's responses were combined afterwards—there was no direct conversation. Joseph Heller, Doris Lessing, John le Carré, Cynthia Ozick, Michael Crichton, Chaim Potok, Toni Morrison, Robert Caro and Mordecai Richler are all authors Gottlieb has edited. Charles McGrath worked with Gottlieb at The New Yorker, *where McGrath is deputy editor. Lynn Nesbit is a literary agent who has worked with Gottlieb on a number of books.*

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JOSEPH HELLER

When I finally completed my second novel, *Something Happened, The New York Times* interviewed me about having finished the book, and I talked to them about Bob's value to me as an editor. The day the interview ran, Bob called me and said he didn't think it was a good idea to talk about editing and the contributions of editors, since the public likes to think everything in the book comes right from the author. That's true, and so from that time on, I haven't.

ROBERT GOTTLIEB

Of course, if anybody says nice things about me in print it's pleasant. But the fact is, this glorification of editors, of which I have been an extreme example, is not a wholesome thing. The editor's relationship to a book should be an invisible one. The last thing anyone reading *Jane Eyre* would want to know, for example, is that I had convinced Charlotte Brontë that the first Mrs. Rochester should go up in flames. The most famous case of editorial intervention in English literature has always bothered me—you know, that Dickens's friend Bulwer-Lytton advised him to change the end of *Great Expectations*: I don't want to know that! As a critic, of course, as a literary historian, I'm interested, but as a reader, I find it very disconcerting. Nobody should know what I told Joe Heller and how grateful he is, if he is. It's unkind to the reader and just out of place.

HELLER

Some of Bob's suggestions for *Catch-22* involved a lot of work. There was a chapter that came on page two hundred or three hundred of the manuscript—I believe it was the one with Colonel Cathcart; it was either that or the Major Major chapter—and he said he liked this chapter, and it was a shame we didn't get to it earlier. I agreed with him, and I cut about fifty or sixty pages from the opening just to get there more quickly.

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GOTTLIEB

Joe Heller and I have always been on exactly the same wavelength editorially, and the most extraordinary proof of this came up when we were working on *Something Happened*. It's a deeply disturbing book about a very conflicted man—a man who is consumed with anxiety and all kinds of serious moral problems—and his name was Bill Slocum. Well, we went through the whole book, and divided it up into chapters and all the rest of it, and at the end of the process I said, Joe, this is going to sound crazy to you but this guy is not a Bill. He said, Oh really, what do you think he is? I said, He's a Bob. And Joe looked at me and said, He *was* a Bob, and I changed his name to Bill because I thought you would be offended if I made him a Bob. I said, Oh no, I don't think he's anything like me, it's just that this character is a Bob. So we changed it back. It was absolutely amazing. How did it happen? I don't know. I suppose our convoluted, neurotic, New York Jewish minds work the same way.

DORIS LESSING

What makes Bob a great editor, probably the best of his time, is that he has read everything, is soaked in the best that has been said and thought and brings this weight of experience into use when he judges the work of his authors. You may think that this kind of background should be taken for granted. Well, once upon a time one could assume that an editor in a serious publishing house had read, could make comparisons. But these days this is not what you find in publishing houses.

GOTTLIEB

A lot of things one doesn't usually think about can affect the reading experience. The way you structure the book, for example—whether you divide it into chapters or let it run uninterrupted, whether you give the chapters titles. . . . Years ago I edited a wonderful novel that later became a successful movie, *Lilith*, by J. R. Salamanca. It was a powerful and affect-

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ing book, and the character who dominated it, who sparked it, was the character named Lilith, but she didn't turn up at all in the first sixty or eighty pages. I don't remember what the original title was, but I suggested to Jack that he change it to *Lilith*, because that way through all the opening pages of the book when Lilith hadn't yet appeared, the reader would be *expecting* her. So just by changing the title one created a tension that wouldn't have been there otherwise.

JOHN LE CARRÉ

Bob will tell me how he understands a story, and where he feels slightly disappointed, perhaps; where the satisfactions are not what he expected, or something of that kind—it remains very loose. He will say to me, I'm going to draw a wavy line down these pages; for me, they're too lyrical, too self-conscious, too over-the-top. And I will say, Okay, for the moment I disagree because I'm in love with every word I've written, but I'll rake it over and lick my wounds, and we'll see what happens. Or he'll say something like, Actually you didn't need this beautiful passage of description here . . . in fact I think it's really a pain. As a rule, he has no quarrel with my characters, though he has always felt I am weaker on girls than on boys, and I think that's true. Occasionally I'll say I disagree, in which case we will leave the matter in suspense until I recognize that he is right. In no case have I ever regretted taking Bob's advice. In all the large things, he's always been right.

GOTTLIEB

For a while I was editing the two best writers of quality who were writing spy novels, John le Carré and Len Deighton, and you couldn't find a more perfect pair of opposites in the editorial process. Le Carré is unbelievably sensitive to editorial suggestion because his ear is so good and because his imagination is so fertile—he'll take the slightest hint and come back with thirty extraordinary new pages. Deighton, on the other hand—who is *totally* willing, *couldn't* be more eager for sug-

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gestions—is one of those writers for whom, once a sentence is down on paper, it takes on a reality that no amount of good will or effort can change. So you can say to him, Len, this is a terrific story but there is a serious problem. He'll say, What is it? What is it? And you say, Well, on page thirty-seven this character is killed, but on page 118 he appears at a party. Oh my God, Len says, this is terrible, but I'll fix it, don't worry. Then you get the manuscript back, and you turn to page thirty-seven, and he'll have changed it to, He was *almost* killed.

LE CARRÉ

A Perfect Spy is the novel of mine which is closest to my heart. It is also my most autobiographical novel, and it skates along the edge of a great deal of childhood pain and stuff. It's always a queasy business when a writer starts moaning about his childhood, so the only way I could redeem the situation was by making the son much less pleasant in many ways. Bob pointed out the places where he felt that the fiction became so autobiographical that it became embarrassing—where he felt that I had really spilled into private experience and had thrown away the mask. He was terribly good at that. What we left on the cutting room floor still makes me blush.

CYNTHIA OZICK

Bob became my editor when David Segal, who had been my editor and heart's friend at Knopf, died at the age of forty-two of a heart attack just before Christmas, 1970. On that same day, or within a week, Bob and Maria's little daughter Elizabeth was born. Bob called me from the hospital right after her birth and said, Don't worry, you're not abandoned, your editor is gone, but I am here, and I will be your editor and publish you. Don't feel that you're deserted or lost. It was one of the most astounding acts of generosity I've encountered in my life. It occurred in the middle of birth, death, bewilderment, grief. Now, very often when I am writing, I have something like a bird sitting on my right shoulder, a

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watchful bird looking over my shoulder at what I am doing. I want that bird's approval—I have to get it. It is a very critical bird, who is in a way a burden, but also grants me *permission*. This bird is the mind of Bob Gottlieb. It is to him I present what I am working on when I am finished, and it is him I want to satisfy and more than satisfy: gratify.

TONI MORRISON

I never write with Bob in mind; that would be very bad for me. He isn't the ideal reader for the product, but he is the ideal editor for it.

GOTTLIEB

The first thing writers want—and this sounds so basic, but you'd be surprised how un-basic it is in the publishing world—is a quick response. Once they've finished a new manuscript and put it in the mail, they exist in a state of suspended emotional and psychic animation until they hear from their editor, and it's cruelty to animals to keep them waiting. I'm lucky, because I happen to be a very quick reader, so I can almost always read a new manuscript overnight. Besides, when I receive a manuscript from a writer I've been working with I'm consumed by curiosity to know what he or she has written. But easy or not, one's first job is a swift and honest response—tempered, of course, by tact.

It took me some time, when I was a very young man, to grasp that a writer—even a mature, experienced one—could have made an emotional transference to me. But of course it makes sense: the editor gives or withholds approval, and even to a certain extent controls the purse strings. It's a relationship fraught with difficulty, because it can lead to infantilizing and then to resentment. Somehow, to be helpful, an editor has to embody authority yet not become possessive or controlling.

MICHAEL CRICHTON

Bob became my editor just after he had moved to Knopf from Simon & Schuster in 1968. Lynn Nesbit was my agent.

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She recommended Bob partly because she thought I'd like him and partly because he was an overnight person. I was being driven mad by the usual publishing business of waiting a month for manuscripts to be read, because in those days I was in medical school and medicine is so fast. To send a manuscript to New York and wait a month—well, you might as well wait for your next reincarnation.

When I sent Bob a draft of *The Andromeda Strain*—the first book I did for him—in 1968 he said he would publish it if I would agree to completely rewrite it. I gulped and said okay. He gave me his feelings about what had to happen on the phone, in about twenty minutes. He was very quick. Anyway, I rewrote it completely. He called me up and said, Well, this is good, now you only have to rewrite *half* of it. Again, he told me what needed to happen—for the book to begin in what was then the middle, and fill in the material from the beginning sometime later on.

Finally we had the manuscript in some kind of shape. I was just completely exhausted. He said to me, Dear boy, you've got this ending backwards. (He's married to an actress, and he has a very theatrical manner. He calls me "dear boy," like an English actor might do.) I don't remember *exactly* the way it was, but I had it so that one of the characters was supposed to turn on a nuclear device, and there was suspense about whether or not that would happen. Bob said, No, no, the switch has to turn *itself* on automatically, and the character has to turn it *off*. He was absolutely right. That was the first time I understood that when there is something wrong in writing, the chances are that there is either too much of it, too little of it, or that it is in some way *backwards*.

GOTTLIEB

When Michael wrote *The Andromeda Strain* he assumed he had to fill out the characters of all those scientists and make them real people, as in a conventional novel. But that wasn't where his interest lay, and so he had only done it at the surface level. Somehow it occurred to me that instead of trying to

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flesh the characters out further and make the novel more conventional, we ought to strip that stuff out completely and make it a documentary, only a fictional one.

CRICHTON

What Bob actually said to me was that he thought the manuscript should be factually persuasive, like a *New Yorker* piece. I thought that was a very interesting idea, but I couldn't see how to do it. I couldn't take his suggestion literally, because in those days the signature of *New Yorker* writers like Lillian Ross was that they were using fictional storytelling techniques in their nonfiction, and my problem was that I had to get *away* from fictional techniques. Finally, I began to think about what I would do if the story were real. Suppose this had actually happened and I were a reporter, what would my book look like? There was a book on my shelf at the time by Walter Sullivan called *We Are Not Alone*. I started thumbing through it, noticing the vocabulary, the cadences of nonfiction and how the structure of the sentences conveys a sense of reality which is not found in fiction.

As soon as I began to do that, it became clear to me that the author of a nonfiction account would not have the access to the characters' innermost thoughts in the way that you assume for fiction. So I began to take all that stuff out and make the book colder and more impersonal—but I didn't do it completely. Bob read it and said, Look, this book can either go this way or that way, and you'll have to decide what you want to do. Ultimately he thought I should just take all the novelistic passages out. He thought the characters shouldn't have any relationships with each other, and that all the dialogue should advance the plot.

He took a much more radical step than I would have dared. It was never again as it was with *The Andromeda Strain*, mostly because I think in the process of working on it Bob taught me a tremendous amount about editing. I never again sent him a manuscript in such a mess. A part of me became Bob, or acted like Bob, and as I was writing I would sit there and

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think, this is what he's going to say, and I'd go fix it. Before *The Andromeda Strain* I didn't really know the extent to which you could write a draft and *not* accept it but rather tear it all apart, move things around, rework them, and then put it all back together. I had never gone through that process in my previous writing, and Bob put me through it. Occasionally Bob has said to me, The new book doesn't work. Forget it. Which I have done. That has happened a few times. But it was in part a result of my method of working, which is to go off and tell nobody what I'm doing and write something; sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. I guess because of my youth it didn't seem so devastating. I just thought, oh well, that didn't work, I'll go do something else. I don't work that way anymore—I'm too old.

Even now, when Bob first calls me back about a manuscript, I panic. But I'll tell you, I think every writer should have tattooed backwards on his forehead, like AMBULANCE on ambulances, the words: *everybody needs an editor.*

GOTTLIEB

It's often the case that the most strained moments in books are the very beginning and the very end—the getting in and the getting out. The ending especially: it's awkward, as if the writer doesn't know when the book is over and nervously says it all again. Sometimes the most useful thing you can tell a writer is, Here's where the book ends—in these next two and a half pages you're just clearing your throat. When I first read Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, to use an extreme example, I recognized that the book had come to an end, and that Chaim had written three hundred more pages. The material that was the motor of the book had worked itself out, and he had gone on to write the sequel. So I called up Chaim's agent and said, I love the book and would like to talk to him about it, but please explain to him it's only on the condition that he drop the last three hundred pages that I want to publish it: if he wants to leave it as it is, it's a different book. Chaim immediately saw the point, so there was no problem.

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MORRISON

Endings I always know, because that's always what the book is about. The problem is getting there. I used to have these really awful beginnings—never really beginnings, they were *starts*—and Bob always caught them. He would say, This is not a beginning, the book is not grounded yet. I originally began *Sula*, for example, with what is now chapter two. Bob told me he felt the first words of the manuscript—"National Suicide Day"—were not the beginning of the book. So I spent a summer trying to write a beginning. And I did it to my satisfaction and, I think, to his.

OZICK

I will tell you two stories, one about somebody else and one about myself. The somebody else is a close friend, also edited by Bob, who when writing a novel tends to find herself writing episodes or short stories. He said to her, Maybe that's just how you write a novel: you have to write short stories, and then you put them together and that's the novel. I, on the other hand, have begun novels and then abandoned them and they have become short stories. He said to me just the opposite: Maybe this is how you write short stories. You have to think you're doing a novel, and then it turns out to be a short story.

MORRISON

Writing my first two books, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula,* I had the anxiety of a new writer who needs to make sure every sentence is exactly the right one. Sometimes that produces a kind of precious, jewelled quality—a tightness, which I particularly wanted in *Sula*. Then after I finished *Sula* and was working on the third book, *Song of Solomon,* Bob said to me, You can loosen, open up. Your writing doesn't have to be so contained, it can be *wider.* I'm not sure these were his exact words, but I know that the consequence of the remarks was that I *did* relax and begin to open up to possibilities. It was because I was able to open up to those possibilities that

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I began to think things like, What would happen if indeed I followed this strange notion or image or picture I had in my mind of this woman who had no navel . . . whereas normally I would have dismissed such an idea as recklessness. It was as if he had said, Be reckless in your imagination.

GOTTLIEB

I remember the discussion with Toni as she was beginning *Song of Solomon,* because although we always did some marginal cosmetic work on her manuscripts, obviously a writer of her powers and discrimination doesn't need a lot of help with her prose. I think I served Toni best by encouraging her—helping to free her to be herself. The only other real help I gave to her was non-editorial: I encouraged her to stop editing and to write full-time, something I knew she wanted to do. As I remember it, I reassured her about her finances—but what I was really saying was, You're not an editor who does some writing, you're a *writer*—acknowledge it; there's nothing to be scared of. We always understood each other—two editors, two lovers of reading, and exactly the same age.

ROBERT CARO

When I first handed in the manuscript of *The Power Broker* it was over a million words. With the technology of that time there was a limited number of words you could fit between two covers and have what they call a manageable trade book—something like seven hundred thousand words, around thirteen-hundred pages. Bob didn't want to do the thing in volumes. He told me, I can get people interested in Robert Moses once, but not twice. So we had to cut three hundred thousand words. That's like cutting a five-hundred-page book out of a book. It's not easy. I would come into Knopf in the morning, day after day, and Bob was running the company, but he would shut the door of his office and we would work on the manuscript all day. Late in the afternoon when I left, there would be a line of people outside his office, waiting for him. I remember there was a point near the end when we thought

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we were done, but it turned out someone had miscounted. Bob called the next week and said, Bob, I have some bad news. We have to cut fifty-thousand more words. It was a terrible thing.

GOTTLIEB

It took a year. *The Power Broker* was Caro's first book, and he had worked on it for eight years in isolation, just him and his wife. It was agony for him to cut it. It was painful for me, too, because I loved the material. I could have read twice as much, but I couldn't print twice as much.

CARO

In order to get enough money to finish *The Power Broker* I had signed a two-book contract with Knopf. After *The Power Broker* I was supposed to do a biography of Fiorello LaGuardia. But I realized after I had signed the contract that I didn't really want to do it. I had seen Robert Moses's life as a way to study how power works in the cities, and I wanted to study the same thing on a national level through the life of Lyndon Johnson, since I thought he understood power better than any other American president. I also wanted to do it in more than one volume, because there were things cut out of *The Power Broker* that I thought should not have been cut.

I expected a big fight over this, because back then nobody was doing multi-volume biographies except academics. So I went in to see Bob about it. Before I had said anything, he said to me, Bob, I've been thinking about you and what you ought to do. I know you've been planning to do the LaGuardia book, but I think what you should really do is a biography of Lyndon Johnson. And he said, I think you should do it in several volumes. It was really quite startling.

GOTTLIEB

That's something an editor can do—come up with an idea for a book. I've done this with happy results a few times. Potok's *Wanderings*, for instance, was originally my idea. I

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thought, I am a Jew who knows nothing about Jewishness: I grew up in an atheist household; I never attended anything. I thought that Chaim could write a very popular and useful book that might instruct someone like me. Years later, I suggested Henry VIII's six wives to Antonia Fraser, and she pounced on it and did a superb job. The most important instance was when I convinced John Cheever to let me put together his collected stories. He kept saying, Why do you want to do this? These stories have all appeared in collections already. I told him it was going to be an immensely important book, and that he should let me read everything, make a selection and see if he liked it—which is what happened. Eventually, after his death, I was asked by his family to edit his journals, for both *The New Yorker* and Knopf. It was the hardest job I've ever done—it involved wrestling a hundred and twenty-five thousand words out of several million. The material was very dark, and most of all, with no author to work with, I was out there alone—with all the responsibility of presenting not only John's words, but his life. But it was also the most gratifying job I've ever done, and one of the very few times in my working life when I've felt I'd actually achieved something.

MORRISON

What I find most useful are the moments when Bob is disturbed by something in a book. He is a marvelous reader, and surrenders completely to a text, so when he finds something invalid or unpersuasive, or if something leaves him disoriented, I know it is important for me to go back to it. I pay a very rigorous attention especially to that level of comfort a reader needs in order to accept the kind of gestures of fantasy I include. I know and he knows I need to create a sense of absolute stability in order to be able to transport the reader into a realm that is not "realistic."

GOTTLIEB

You have to surrender to a book. If you do, when something in it seems to be going askew, you are wounded. The more

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you have surrendered to a book, the more jarring its errors appear. I read a manuscript very quickly, the moment I get it. I usually won't use a pencil the first time through because I'm just reading for impressions. When I reach the end, I'll call the writer and say, I think it's very fine (or whatever), but I think there are problems *here* and *here*. At that point I don't know *why* I think that—I just think it. Then I go back and read the manuscript again, more slowly, and I find and mark the places where I had negative reactions to try to figure out what's wrong. The second time through I think about solutions—maybe this needs expanding, maybe there's too much of *this* so it's blurring *that*.

Editing requires you to be always open, always responding. It is very important, for example, not to allow yourself to want the writer to write a certain kind of book. Sometimes that's hard. My favorite of Heller's books is *Something Happened*. When we are working on a manuscript, Joe is always telling me (rightly) that I want him to write *Something Happened* again, and that he could only write it once. Inevitably you will like some of a writer's books better than others. But when you're working on a manuscript, that can't matter. You have to be inside *that* book and do your best to make it as good as it can be. And if you can't approach it in that spirit, you shouldn't be working on it.

POTOK

Bob always zeroes in on those aspects of a manuscript I also have some questions about. He reads the entire book through, and then we talk about it. He is so tuned in to what I'm doing that we can talk in shorthand—someone listening to the conversation probably wouldn't be able to understand what was being said.

CHARLES MCGRATH

Bob has an uncanny knack for putting his finger on that one sentence, or that one paragraph, that somewhere in the back of your mind you knew wasn't quite right but was close

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enough so that you decided to worry about it later. Then you forgot about it, or you convinced yourself that it was okay, because it was too much trouble to change. He always goes right to those places. It's an instinct. He and I share a belief that if you take care of all the tiny problems in a piece, all that small attention will somehow make a big difference. Sometimes I think that's just a touching faith of ours, and that, in fact, nobody ever notices whether, say, you use the same word twice in a paragraph. At other times, I'm convinced that the details are all that matter.

GOTTLIEB

Editing is simply the application of the common sense of any good reader. That's why, to be an editor, you have to be a reader. It's the number one qualification. Because you could have all the editorial tools, but if you're not a responsive reader you won't sense where the problems lie. I am a reader. My life is reading. In fact, I was about forty years old when I had an amazing revelation (this is going to sound dumb): it suddenly came to me that not every person in the world assumed, without thinking about it, that reading was the most important thing in life. I hadn't known that. I hadn't even known that *I* had thought it, it was so basic to me.

Oddly enough, I find that reading non-editorially is a very different experience for me. When I'm reading for pleasure I don't tend to think as an editor, even with books I've edited. I remember, for instance, that when the finished book of Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* came into the office I decided to reread it although it had only been three or four months since I'd read it in galleys. It was as if I were reading something I had never read before, because I was reading it simply for fun. Very rarely have I had the impulse to make changes in a book I'm just reading for pleasure or instruction. It's only bad translations that drive me to madness and make me reach for a pencil.

MCGRATH

Bob is the best-read person I've ever met. I used to have a somewhat inflated notion of how well-read I was, but Bob

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makes me look like someone who's just got his first library card. It's because his ear is so well trained that he never falters in questions of tone.

LE CARRÉ

Bob is very brainy in academic terms, much more erudite, much brainier than I am. He's very cosmopolitan in some ways. He's got quite a European soul, although he is also the quintessential New Yorker. I think he was at Cambridge for a couple of years, so he relishes the notions of understatement and disguise and so on.

MORRISON

I can never tell Bob—in fact I've only recently begun to tell *anybody*—what I am doing *critically* in a book. If I think I am recasting language in a certain way, or manipulating history so that it becomes flesh—whatever I think is radical and interventionist and different about my work in terms of American literature in general—the lit-crit stuff—I never get into that with Bob. He isn't interested in it, and it wouldn't be useful for us to talk about it, because *enfin* a book has to work as a book for someone who just isn't going to pick up on all these clever things you think you're doing. Sometimes Bob will say he thinks I'm editorializing, and I can't remember a time when he hasn't been right about that. He sees those places where, particularly earlier on, you didn't know how to dramatize something, so you editorialized it. I always know what I will not alter under any circumstances. Sometimes I just say no, and Bob won't pursue it, because he knows that if I say no it means something quite different from "I don't want to." It's in the areas in which you did the best you could, but you weren't entirely pleased, or you weren't quite sure, that you need the third eye. Given a few more years I suppose I would identify the problem myself, but a good editor is a shortcut.

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CRICHTON

In my experience of writing, you generally start out with some overall idea that you can see fairly clearly, as if you were standing on a dock and looking at a ship on the ocean. At first you can see the entire ship, but then as you begin work you're in the boiler room and you can't see the ship anymore. All you can see are the pipes and the grease and the fittings of the boiler room, and you have to *assume* the ship's exterior. What you really want in an editor is someone who's still on the dock, who can say, Hi, I'm looking at your ship, and it's missing a bow, the front mast is crooked, and it looks to me as if your propellers are going to have to be fixed.

GOTTLIEB

For some writers a solution provided by an editor is of no use. When I worked with Margaret Atwood at *The New Yorker*, for instance, whether there was a plot problem or a punctuation problem, if the solution came from her it worked wonderfully. But if I offered one myself, it never took. Now another writer might say, It's no good your telling me this is the *wrong* word if you don't give me the *right* word.

Of course, I have also spent a great deal of my life working with writers who are simply bad. I have fixed more sentences than most people have read in their lives. I remember Michael Korda and I, years ago, used to write whole pages of other people's novels together. And sometimes problems are unsolvable. There are books that are never going to come fully to life, either because the idea was wrong, or it was the wrong idea for that writer, or the writer is just not good. Then the reviewers say, What this book needed was a good editor. But those are usually the books that have had the *most* editing.

CRICHTON

Once I called Bob because I'd read a book he had edited, and had found it redundant. I called him up and said, Boy, that book wasn't very well edited. There was a *very* snarky silence because he did not take criticism well at *all*. There was

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this long silence. Then he said, Dear boy! I think you should consider, when you read a book that seems to you to be not well enough edited, that perhaps it has already been *incredibly* edited. And of course that was probably true.

LE CARRÉ

Bob knows how much to tell me and how much to leave to me. I think that is really one of his crucial virtues. There are so many young editors I hear of who are practically trying to write the book for you. Bob is like a good movie director with an actor: he's just trying to get the best out of you.

CRICHTON

Bob always says he is an editor, not a writer. He has a way of not competing with you, which is very reassuring. If you hear criticism from Bob you never think, as you sometimes do with other people, Well, he's just jealous because he wants to be me. And that helps in terms of hearing things from him that you might not want to hear. It was from Bob that I learned to ask readers, Tell me how you reacted, not what you think ought to be done. Because very often people will jump to their sense of what needs to be fixed and bypass the initial reader's perception of what was lacking in his experience. Also, I'm usually better at fixing my own writing than they are.

GOTTLIEB

Your job as an editor is to figure out what the book needs, but the writer has to provide it. You can't be the one who says, Send him to Hong Kong at this point, let him have a love affair with a cocker spaniel. Rather, you say, This book needs something at this point: it needs opening up, it needs a direction, it needs excitement. When people say to me, Oh you're so creative, I try to explain that I'm *not* creative. I simply have certain other qualities that are necessary for my kind of work. It has liberated me, being happy being what I am. There are editors who will always feel guilty that they aren't writers.

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I can write perfectly well—anybody who's educated can write perfectly well. But I dislike writing: it's very, very hard, and I just don't like the activity. Whereas reading is like breathing.

MORRISON

I think we erroneously give pride of place to the act of writing rather than the act of reading. People think you just read because you can understand the language, but a certain kind of reading is a very high-level intellectual process. I have such reverence for that kind of sensitive reading—it is not just absorbing things and identifying what's wrong but a much deeper thing that I can see would be perfectly satisfying. Anyway, this separation is fairly recent: not long ago the great readers *were* the great writers, the great critics *were* the great novelists, the great poets *were* the great translators. People didn't make these big distinctions about which one was more thrilling than the other.

Writing for me is just a very sustained process of reading. The only difference is that writing a book might take three or four years, and *I'm* doing it. I never wrote a line until after I became an editor, and only then because I wanted to read something that I couldn't find. That was the first book I wrote.

OZICK

If Bob identifies a snag in a manuscript and neither one of us can immediately come up with a solution, he will always say to me, go figure it out and then come back. His fixes are never, as often happens with other editors, editorial patches, impositions that don't match the language or the tone of the writer. The point about Bob Gottlieb is that he never imposes.

MORDECAI RICHLER

I cannot tolerate editors who go in for line-by-line criticism, or who cross out words and substitute words of their own, or who will cross out two pages and write over them, *cut*. Bob has never been so officious.

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GOTTLIEB

Many people have this vulgar idea that writers and editors are at each others' throats, that they are antagonistic. That is craziness. No editor should work with a book he doesn't like, because his job as an editor is to make something better of what it is. If you try to turn a book into something it isn't, you're doomed to disaster.

An editor has to be selfless, and yet has also to be strong-minded. If you don't know what you think, or if you're nervous about expressing your opinions, what good is that to a writer? I remember one book of John Cheever's I was working on, I felt there was a minor problem with the ending. At first I thought, who am I to be telling John Cheever to change the end of his novel? And then I thought, Well, I'm the editor he chose, and I can't, out of cowardice, withhold what I think. I'm not forcing him to do anything. I'm saying, This is what I think is wrong, and it's up to him to decide whether to take my advice or not. As it happened, he immediately got the point and found a solution.

CARO

I have a bad temper, and though Bob would deny it, so does he. While we were editing we were always jumping up and getting out of the room to cool off. Now he, of course, had the great advantage over me because when we were working at Knopf he could leave and go to somebody else's office and transact some business, but I had no place to go but the bathroom. I went to the bathroom a lot, as I remember. And oh, his tone! If you heard his tone! It gets me so angry I have to try to drown it out. I try not to hear the insulting things he's saying because, as I said, I have a very bad temper.

GOTTLIEB

Bob Caro and I are always shouting at each other and carrying on because for him each manuscript has been so much work, so much effort, so much obsessive concentration, that everything is of equal weight because everything is of total

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weight. Your job with a writer like that is to be able to say, You may have done an equally brilliant job on all of these things, but this has more weight than that, and you have to give some of that up. Sometimes in the heat of discussion, that can seem to a writer like an attack. And that's not helpful, though at times it can be therapeutic. If you are a good editor, your relationship with every writer is different. To some writers you say things you couldn't say to others, either because they'd be angry or because it would be too devastating to them. You can't have only one way of doing things; on some instinctual level you have to respond not just to the words of the writer but to the temperament of the writer. That may be hard for some editors; I haven't found it hard, perhaps because I like to please people. Joe Heller and I, for instance, have never had a bad moment because he is perfectly detached. When you're editing a manuscript with him the two of you can look at it as though you were two surgeons examining a body stretched out upon a table. You just cut it open, deal with the offending organs, and stitch it up again. Joe is completely objective, he has that kind of mind, even immediately after finishing a book.

We worked like dogs on *Catch-22*, and then just before it went to press I was reading it again, and I came to a chapter I'd always hated. I thought it was pretentious and literary. I said to Joe, You know, I've always hated this chapter, and he said, Well take it out. And out it went. He printed it many years later in *Esquire* as the lost chapter of *Catch-22*. That's Joe Heller. Now that doesn't mean he's better than Bob Caro. It means he has a completely different temperament in relation to his work. Joe is a pragmatist; Bob is a romantic.

Doris Lessing also has a very removed attitude to her writing. You can say to Doris exactly what you think without fear either of wounding her or overly influencing her. The day after she gave me the manuscript for *The Summer Before the Dark* we were walking in Queen Mary's rose garden in London; she asked me what I thought about the manuscript. I said I liked it very much and told her I was sure it was going to be her

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most successful book. She said, Now that's interesting, because it's by no means my *best* book. There are not many writers whose clarity and disinterestedness are such that they could say that about a book they had *just finished*.

LE CARRÉ

There are some writers who put in a first chapter and need lunch immediately. They need babysitting; they need to be able to call up at 2:00 A.M. and say they're about to slit their wrists and so on. I don't want to see my publishers, editors or anybody until I've produced my baby. If I have frightful headaches about how to make my story work or how to end it or something like that, I will never communicate them until I resolve the thing somehow. So my first use of Bob, if you will, is for his spontaneous response to something he knows nothing about. Then I'm dealing with the Bob Gottlieb who might have picked the novel up in a bookshop.

GOTTLIEB

Some writers need you to read their book as they're writing it. I worked with one writer who wanted to call me up every day and read me what she had written. I discouraged her.

MORRISON

Some authors really want their books to be loved and want themselves to be loved, but I don't want that. I don't want my hand held, I don't want to be stroked, I don't want to be patronized, I don't want any of those things. And I never got any of that from Bob. As a result, our editing sessions are vital, they are hard, and they are *tremendous* fun.

CARO

The most important thing I ever heard Bob say was at Knopf one time when we were standing in the hallway outside his office and some other editor came along and, in that jocular way editors have, he said, So, when is this book going to be delivered? Bob said, *Don't ever ask him that*. I've never

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forgotten it. All through our relationship we've had a tacit understanding that the words *delivery date* are never to be mentioned.

CRICHTON

From time to time ours was an irritable relationship. Sometimes in later years I would send Bob drafts that were not cleaned up enough, and he would be a little short about the fact that he was being shown something that was not ready. He would never address it directly. He would never say, Why are you sending me this, you haven't worked on it enough. There would just be this *feeling*.

Bob is very skillful at motivation. He really knows how to make you work. He would call me up and say, Dear boy! I have read your manuscript, and here is what you have to do. And he was not above saying, I don't know if you can do it this way, I don't know if you're up to it—which of course would drive me into a fury of effort. It was *very* effective. And it was only years later that I thought, You know, I think he probably said that on purpose.

GOTTLIEB

I certainly didn't say anything like that to Michael on purpose. I do what I think I have to do and respond to people as I respond to them. I intensely dislike manipulating people, just as I resent being manipulated.

As an editor I have to be tactful, of course (which I wasn't very good at when I was young). But goodwill has to be natural. You can't fake it. It just doesn't work that way.

LE CARRÉ

Negotiations were always tight with Bob. He was celebrated for not believing in huge advances, and it didn't matter that three other houses were offering literally twice what he was offering. He felt that for half the money, you got the best. Most publishers, when you arrive in New York with your (as you hope) best-selling manuscript, send flowers to your suite,

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arrange for a limo, maybe, at the airport, and then let you go and put on the nosebag at some great restaurant. The whole idea is to make you feel great. With Bob you did best to arrive in jeans and sneakers, and then you lay on your tummy side-by-side with him on the floor of his office and sandwiches were brought up.

After I finished one book, I think it was *A Perfect Spy*, my agent called me and said, Okay, we've got X-zillion yen and whatnot, and I said, *And lunch*. My agent said, What? I said, *And lunch*. When I get to New York I want to be taken, by Bob, to a decent restaurant for once and not eat one of those lousy tuna sandwiches lying on my tummy in his room. Bob called me that evening and said, I think we have a deal; and is that true about lunch? And I said, Yup, Bob, that's the break point in the deal. Very well, he said. Not a lot of laughter. So I arrived in New York, and there was Bob, a rare sight in a suit, and we went to a restaurant he had found out about. He ate *extremely* frugally, and drank nothing, and watched me with venomous eyes as I made my way through the menu.

GOTTLIEB

Yes, boys must have their fun! The thing is, when I was a kid in publishing in the fifties, the way business was done, the way you met people, was at lunches. So when I had been at Simon & Schuster a year they said, You should have an expense account. I said, That's very nice but I don't know anybody to take out to lunch. So they said, Well, we'd better give you an agent. The agent they gave me was a young man named Georges Borchardt. They gave me Georges because I read French, and at the time Georges was handling only French books. So Georges and I had many, many lunches on my expense account, and we're close friends to this day. But after a while, of course, I met more people until I got to the point where having lunch with them all the time seemed to be yielding diminishing returns—you're out for two hours, two and a half hours, you overeat, you've wasted all that time, it's disgusting. So when I went to Knopf I said, This is it, I

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won't do lunch anymore. The best thing that ever came from my spartan eating habits was that I first met my great pal Nora Ephron when the *Times Book Review* commissioned her to do some fatuous piece on how and where editors lunched.

CARO

Bob and I would have big fights over colons and semicolons. Semicolons are not quite as forceful as colons. And dashes are very important to me—I establish my rhythm with them. We could spend a long time fighting over an adjective. We had such fights that sometimes he would bring in another editor as a buffer. When Bob is editing something he's very careful that the rhythm stays the same, which is very hard to do. I had huge fights with William Shawn when he excerpted *The Power Broker* for *The New Yorker*. One time my editor there, William Whitworth, who's now at *The Atlantic*, put Shawn on the line, and Shawn said, But we've hardly changed it at all, we haven't changed any of the words. I said, But you ran three paragraphs together—paragraphs *matter* to me, they're part of my rhythm. You're combining sentences, making periods into semicolons, semicolons into commas—that *is* changing my writing. Those fights were not nice fights; they were bitter, angry fights. Now there's never anything like that with Bob.

I've always believed that for a non-fiction work to endure, its prose has to be at just as high a level as that of a good novel, and Bob believes that too. When we're working together, what matters—and it is *all* that matters—is what is on the page.

MCGRATH

There's always a tension between a writer's idiosyncratic way of presenting himself and the house style, but magazines need house style. If you don't have some kind of consistent way of doing things, it looks as if you've lost your mind.

GOTTLIEB

This is in fact the great difference between being a book editor and being a magazine editor, as I discovered in my

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years at *The New Yorker*. In book publishing, the editor and the author have the same goal: to make the book as good as it can be, and to sell as many copies as possible. In a magazine, it's a different matter. Of course a magazine editor wants the writing to be as good as possible, but he wants it to be as good as possible *for the magazine*, while the writer wants to preserve his piece's integrity. At a magazine, the writer can always withdraw his piece, but basically the editor is in charge. In book publishing, editors are the servants of the writers, and if we don't serve writers well, they leave us.

Another difference is that a book publishing house is much less bound up with the personality of its editor in chief. A good house is a collection of highly individual editors with very individual tastes, all of whom contribute different things to the list. A magazine, on the other hand, is in a sense an *emanation* of its chief editor—of his impulses and views and, to use a disgusting word, *vision*. The editors I worked with at *The New Yorker* were not essentially procuring editors—they were working editors. Only The Editor had the authority to buy a piece.

Magazines have to be run that way, because a magazine has to be itself. A magazine's subscribers and advertisers and owner have a right to get every week or month whatever it is they've been led to expect they're going to get. If someone becomes an *Economist* advertiser because he likes *The Economist,* and then one day opens an issue and sees his ad in a magazine that looks more like *Playboy,* he's not going to be happy. And vice versa. A publishing house has much more leeway, because its constituency isn't fixed. Nobody out there is buying a hundred fifty Knopf books a year. Someone might buy *In the Kitchen with Rosie* or Cormac McCarthy or *Miss Piggy's Guide to Life* or *The Audubon Guide to Wildflowers of the East* or *How We Die,* but he won't buy all of them. This also means that as a book publisher you are far less conscious of people looking over your shoulder—if your house comes out with a profit, no one's going to complain that this year's list looks different from last year's. Then again, I have never

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worked in an unsuccessful publishing house. I suppose that if your books are crummy and you're losing money every year, you'll feel the Loch Ness monster on your tail.

MCGRATH

People have accused *New Yorker* style of being comma-ridden, but Bob had no trouble with it. In fact Bob sometimes wanted commas where even Miss Gould, our great copy editor, didn't see the need for them, which was quite astonishing to some of us. Bob is concerned above all with making the meaning and intention of a sentence crystal clear. He can become quite ingenious, almost paranoid, thinking of ways that a reader might possibly misconstrue something.

He is a Tartar, too, about participial clauses. He will often take a relative clause—a "that" clause or a "which" clause—and make it into a participial phrase or a gerund phrase. And he has a great nose for cant and pretension and highfalutin crap of any sort. He goes at it like a terrier. It's as if he can smell it.

GOTTLIEB

I have idiosyncrasies in punctuation, like everybody else. Because one of the formative writers of my life was Henry James, it's all too easy for me to pepper a text with dashes. Many people don't like dashes. With Le Carré, I'm always putting commas in, and he's always taking them out, but we know that about each other. He'll say, Look, if you absolutely need this one, have it. And I'll say, Well, I would have liked it, but I guess I can live without it. We accommodate each other. When I was a young firebrand it never occurred to me that I might be wrong, or that I wasn't going to have my way, or that it wasn't my job to impose my views. I could get into twenty-minute shouting matches over semicolons, because every semicolon was a matter of life or death. As you grow older you realize that there are bad lines in *King Lear* and it has survived.

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MCGRATH

There was a certain type of writing we used to laugh about a lot. We called it "cry of the loon" writing—that kind of overblown nature prose. Bob has a deadly instinct for when that stuff has gone ripe. He has a fine ear for English as it's spoken, and a lot of his work as an editor is taking stilted, artificial language and pushing it in the direction of the vernacular. How words sound on a page (if that's not an oxymoron) is what Bob listens for.

GOTTLIEB

There are certain locutions I become obsessed with. I hate the overuse of the word *continued*: he *continued* to eat his soup, instead of he *went on eating* his soup. That is something I must have changed ten thousand times in five years at *The New Yorker*. Impoverished vocabulary disturbs me. I used to joke with my colleagues about V.E.—verb enrichment. I hate it when a writer uses the word "walk" thirty times in two pages, for example. At *The New Yorker* changing things like that was difficult because the editors there had been trained that an editor does not *improve* writing, he makes it *correct*. I was a book editor, though, and my job has always been to help writers make books better.

I often argue with Bob Caro about his use of certain words—*loom*, for example, because it's such an inflated verb. One of Bob's great talents is creating a scene, and that's wonderful, but when you're a biographer or a historian, whose basic concern is accuracy, you must be very wary of overloading the language to make dramatic points. Caro likes to dramatize, and he tends to see people as larger than life. As I've often said to him, he's even done that to me; he's romanticized me as The Editor, as the one he can trust.

LE CARRÉ

Bob is a very fastidious man. Battle scenes, for example. I wrote *The Honourable Schoolboy* just after returning from Cambodia and Vietnam, where I had been hanging around

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with a journalist, so it had battlefield sequences and things. Bob tends to go very quiet when he reads that stuff and turns over the pages rather quickly. It's not a world he's ever had to venture into, thank God, and I think he just doesn't care for it very much. I would not see him as the best person to edit *The Naked and the Dead*, for example. Or James Jones. Still, Bob is amazingly catholic as an editor; that is to say, I know that if I'd written a golf book, Bob would have been very good about my golf book. He would not have tried to turn it into a prose poem about something different. I expect with his romantic novelists he doesn't fight with them about split infinitives; he doesn't worry too much about dangling clauses. He can live with bad books if they're *good* bad books.

MCGRATH

Anyone can take a piece and tart it up, and in so doing layer another sensibility or another vocabulary on top of what's there, but Bob doesn't do that. He has a great ability to get inside a piece and instinctively understand the terms and the vocabulary of the writer, and make changes in those terms and that vocabulary. This is one of the hallmarks of great editing: when it is done right, you don't notice it.

GOTTLIEB

I happen to be a kind of word whore. I will read anything from Racine to a nurse romance, if it's a good nurse romance. Many people just aren't like that. Some of my closest friends cannot read anything that isn't substantial—they don't see the point. I don't, however, like a certain kind of very rich, ornate, literary writing. I feel as if I'm being choked, as if gravel is being poured down my throat. Books like *Under the Volcano,* for instance, are not for me.

LYNN NESBIT

I probably wouldn't send a postmodernist writer to Bob. Bob likes books with a strong sense of narrative. I think he would have admired Donald Barthelme or William Gass, but they wouldn't be *natural* writers for him to work with.

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GOTTLIEB

Some marriages are not made in heaven. I inherited Gail Godwin from another editor who had published Godwin's early work at Harper's. Now, Gail was extremely sensitive, and she viewed herself as a highly successful commercial writer, whereas I viewed her as a rather literary writer with a limited readership. She couldn't live that way, and eventually, although we worked together very cordially on several books, she moved to Viking. She had shown them a book she was working on, and they saw it the way she saw it—as a major commercial novel—and they paid her a lot of money, and indeed it became a big bestseller and made her famous and successful. I didn't read her that way, and I still feel that her earlier work, which was less commercial, is more interesting. But she wanted to develop in a different direction, and I'm sure she doesn't feel that she compromised in any way to do that. In other words, I was the wrong editor-publisher for her, and she was wise to leave me.

One writer I worked with—I don't remember who it was—got absolutely nothing out of the one meeting we had. Some time afterwards he wrote an article for a magazine and, referring to this encounter (without using my name), he wrote something like: "He told me to 'let it breathe.' What does that mean? A completely useless, stupid remark." Now I knew exactly what I meant, and another writer would have known exactly what I meant, but the comment was useless to him. It wasn't a bad thing for me to say, nor was he being stupid or resistant: it was just that my ways of communicating were never going to work with him. It was not a proper marriage, and luckily we got a quick divorce.

LESSING

I don't remember any serious disagreements, but this does not mean Bob has liked everything I have written. He doesn't like *The Sentimental Agents*, for instance, which I do like.

GOTTLIEB

I did think *The Sentimental Agents* was rather schematic. It was an idea rather than fiction. It's part of Doris's space

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fiction series, and like all space fiction, or science fiction, it is underlain by a highly moralistic, utopian impulse. When that kind of thing works it's because the idea becomes clothed in specifics that are interesting, exciting, moving, whatever, and in most of the books in that series I think that did happen, but in this particular book I felt the ideas were bare.

RICHLER

Once when *Maclean's* magazine was running a profile on me they rang Bob and ran one of my quotes by him. Asked about my film work, I had told *Maclean's* I used other muscles. Yes, said Bob, his sphincter.

MORRISON

Bob once used an adjective about one of my books—*Beloved*—that I'd never, ever, ever heard him use before, about my book or anybody else's. He said "great." It's funny, because everybody says "great" about anything. What's the weather like? It's great. How do you feel? Great. But I know that when Bob said it, in that context, he meant *that*. He didn't mean something else. He might say wonderful, when something was wonderfully done, but he never said *great*.

CARO

In all the hours of working on *The Power Broker* Bob never said one nice thing to me—never a single complimentary word, either about the book as a whole or about a single portion of the book. That was also true of my second book, *The Path to Power*. But then he got soft. When we finished the last page of the last book we worked on, *Means of Ascent*, he held up the manuscript for a moment and said, slowly, as if he didn't want to say it, "not bad." Those are the only two complimentary words he has ever said to me, to this day.

LESSING

Bob has been advising me and editing my work for thirty or more years. It is hard to remember details now. I have just

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been reading my diary for 1978, where it records that I spent some days making alterations he suggested. I remember cutting quite a bit out of *The Sirian Experiments*. I cut a bit out of *The Four-Gated City* at his suggestion, which perhaps was a mistake. Bob has made mistakes. But, nearly always, he is right. I don't think Bob would be surprised to hear that I would describe him as an authoritarian personality. Why should he? I've told him so. We are good enough friends for us both to put up with this kind of mutual criticism.

GOTTLIEB

Well, I describe *her* as authoritarian. So there you are. But this is actually more complicated than that, because my neurotic vision of myself is of a fly on the wall. I see myself as an observer, as someone who could not possibly affect any other human being, not even my children. Now, I'm an acute observer and an analyzed person, so I know perfectly well from the evidence of my eyes and ears that I have a strong personality and have no problem running large organizations, and I know that I've had a considerable effect on many people. I know I have a great deal of personal authority. But there's a disparity between what I know and what I feel. I've never quite understood why people do what I say. But then, I've never taken myself very seriously.

POTOK

There is a certainty, an ease, an assuredness that comes from Bob, and when you're a writer and you're constantly living in a world of panic and uncertainty, to have that in an editor is a valuable thing indeed.

MORRISON

Bob and I used to joke about our egos being so huge that they didn't exist—which is a way of saying that neither he nor I felt we were in competition with anybody. That's not a very nice thing to say about myself or him; but at the same time, it's important to remember that a large ego can be gener-

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ous and enabling, because of its lack of envy. There was a way in which our confidence was wide-spirited.

NESBIT

People always say Bob has such an enormous ego, but I say that Bob takes this enormous ego and lends it to the writer, thereby reinforcing the writer's ego. Bob is very generous with his ego.

GOTTLIEB

When you're dealing with nonprofessional writers, you have to give them a tremendous amount of encouragement simply to convince them that they can write at all. Lauren Bacall is a perfect example. I knew she could write her own book, and I knew that she would never be satisfied if she had a ghost-writer, but she didn't know how to do it, so finally we set up a system. She would come into the office every day and write in longhand on yellow pads, and every night little elves would type up what she had written during the day. She kept saying, Is it all right? and I would say, Yes, yes, it's fine. You write it, I'll edit it. And it *was* fine. Of course, it needed standard editorial work, but it was her book, it came right out of her. Betty Bacall is a bright Jewish girl from New York—she wasn't going to write a bad book.

I did Liv Ullmann's book too. She had already written it in Norwegian and had it translated, and she wanted someone to edit it in English. The first time I met her it was winter, and she came into the office wearing a big fur coat. I took her coat, we had a long talk, and after about forty-five minutes I said, Come on, I'll walk you around the office and introduce you to some of the people you'll be working with. She said all right, and she stood up and started putting on her coat. I said, Why are you putting on your coat, it's boiling in these offices, and she said, I'm putting on my coat because I'm so fat I don't want anyone to see me. Now, I'm married to an actress, and this triggered something in me, and I completely forgot that I had just met her forty-five minutes ago. I said,

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Wait a minute. Number one, it's very hot in here. Number two, you do *not* look fat, you look great. And number three, you're not putting on your coat. This is just what I would have said to my wife, Maria. And she said, Oh, fine, and took off her coat. Because she's an actress—she needed the director to tell her she looked great and she needed reassurance. Yet she had written a very fine book on her own.

OZICK

Whenever I have a problem, Bob always says to me, Well, *Maria* . . . and then goes on to tell me how he had *exactly* this sort of problem with *Maria*, and here is the way *Maria* handled it. He is so skilled at this that I've never been able to tell whether Maria has always had exactly my problems or whether she has become a kind of pedagogical—or even mythological—device. It depends, of course, on what kind of human being he is, but an editor is often a father figure, a mother figure, a kind of ministerial figure . . . a *teacher* is really what I mean—someone who stands in authority over you and has something to tell you. I've had certain stumbling-block problems in my life, as others have, and every few years I would go and see Bob on some editorial occasion, and I would tell him where I was stumped and how I was stumbling. He would talk to me about whatever it was and generally give me enough perspective in an hour or an hour and a half that I left his office feeling restored and able to put my hands back on the ropes. I never thought that at *The New Yorker* he would have time to do Cynthia-therapy, but he did.

HELLER

Bob and I think of each other as close friends, but ten years might go by before we talk to each other or drop each other a note. In between my novels—and my novels come at long intervals—we've barely communicated.

CARO

We have, basically, no social relationship whatsoever. When the Book-of-the-Month Club bought the first volume of the

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Lyndon Johnson trilogy they had a lunch for me. Al Silverman, who was then the president, started the conversation saying, Well, you two must see so much of each other. . . . There was an embarassing silence: at that point Bob and I hadn't seen each other socially for years.

CRICHTON

There is absolutely no question that I see Bob paternally. Absolutely no question. There is a lot of jealousy involved in your relationship with your editor. You don't want to walk into the office and see another writer chatting with Bob—you'd want to kill them. So you learn to schedule your appointments so you can see Daddy all by yourself. I remember at one point I wanted a larger advance and Bob didn't want to give it to me. He asked Lynn Nesbit, my agent, Why does Michael want such a big advance? And she said, Well, Bob, I think he wants to buy a house. Bob said, Well what does he need such a big house for, and she said, Bob, he's married now and has a child. There was a way in which, as with a parent, I was always this young kid to him, and it never really changed. So maybe there was some counter-transference too.

LE CARRÉ

Young writers taken on by publishing houses these days seem to be treated with a great deal more sanity than used to be the case. American publishing went through a phase: just as American acting was haunted by the Brando example, so American publishing was haunted by the Fitzgerald example. For decades it was regarded as almost mandatory that a writer be drunk half the day, that he have an appallingly untidy sex life, be manic-depressive, need a doctor. . . . I have the impression that publishers don't do all that wet-nursing in the way that they used to. You're much more on your own, and that may not be a bad thing. I don't think writers need all that sympathy. They need to be told when their books are bad. The excessively sycophantic phase of American publishing has been forced off the stream because it's simply not cost-effective anymore.

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LESSING

There have been two pressures that have eroded excellence in publishing. One is its increasing commercialization, the other is politics. We now have a generation of people whose literary education has consisted not of being soaked in excellence, but of judging novels and stories by their theme or by the color or political stance of their authors. Now it is common to meet editors who will talk about a second-rate book as if it were the best. My guess is that they probably started off with high standards—that is, if they weren't political—but the commercial pressures slowly brought them low.

LE CARRÉ

It is necessary to remember that the great middle-European tradition of publishing and editing, which was largely that of Jewish intellectuals, moved almost in toto to the United States and didn't stop much in England. The excellence of the editorial process at Knopf, with or without Bob, is still streets ahead of anything at a British counterpart. The British style, with the exception of a few houses, is pretty much to print what they've bought, these days, misspellings and all. I'm not trying to make some spiteful point, it's just a fact of life. I think American publishing is pretty resilient, despite its anxieties, and it does produce very clever people. The trouble is that the tempo of it all—the speed with which books go on and off the market and shoot to the top of the bestseller list, only to be unheard of three months later—produces a much faster and more careless approach to the product itself. That is true. But that has its advantages too, I expect.

MCGRATH

These days most people at the heads of magazines and publishing houses don't do the nitpicky stuff that Bob does. They don't have time. Perhaps they hope the little stuff will get done by someone else, or perhaps they secretly believe that even if it isn't done they can get away with it. There has been a great change in the notion of what editing means.

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Increasingly, editing means going to lunch. It means editing with a credit card, not with a pencil.

NESBIT

There's so much concern for the bottom line these days. Of course, it's not that twenty-five years ago everyone was publishing such wonderful literary things and didn't care about finances; but now that the publishing houses have become larger, and books sell many more copies than they used to, writers want bigger advances, the pressures are greater. I think that's one of the reasons that, when Bob left Knopf, he was glad to be out.

LE CARRÉ

You have to give a little thought, in human terms, to what Bob's doing at the moment. It's an extraordinary situation, where the guy was captain of the ship all those years, and now goes back as a humble member of the crew, working as a line editor, without any executive powers at all. Bob had three ambitions in his life. They involved the New York City Ballet, Knopf and *The New Yorker*. And he achieved them all. There's a Jewish prayer which says, May we never realize our dreams; but Bob did realize his dreams, and it ended with *The New Yorker*. And at sixty-one he decided that what he really liked doing was what he had done at the beginning of his publishing life, which was editing.

MORRISON

I was an editor myself for a long while, and I have great difficulty explaining what was so gratifying about it. I suppose editing is almost maternal at times: you see yourself as being able to deliver something nurturing and corrective, and the benefit and the pleasure is in seeing the nurturing and the corrective show without your fingerprints. If it has your fingerprints on it, it's no good. It's like knowing you've been successful with your children when they don't need you.

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GOTTLIEB

What is it that impels this act of editing? I know that in my case it's not merely about words. Whatever I look at, whatever I encounter, I want it to be good—whether it's what you're wearing, or how the restaurant has laid the table, or what's going on on stage, or what the president said last night, or how two people are talking to each other at a bus stop. I don't want to interfere with it or control it, exactly—I want it to *work*, I want it to be happy, I want it to come out right. If I hadn't gone into publishing, I might have been a psychoanalyst; I might have been, I think, a rabbi, if I'd been at all religious. My impulse to make things good, and to make good things better, is almost ungovernable. I suppose it's lucky I found a wholesome outlet for it.

This is going to sound ungrateful, but I've had more recognition than anybody should have for doing a job that isn't running the United Nations, and I used to ask myself, Why have I done so well? I really didn't understand it. I used to feel I was a fraud because I had had so much success and done so little to deserve it. And then I realized, you don't have to be a genius to be an editor. You don't have to have a great inspirational talent to be a publisher. You just have to be capable, hard-working, energetic, sensible and full of goodwill. Those shouldn't be rare qualities, and they don't deserve a lot of credit, because you're either born with them or you're not. It's luck. And that's why you can be as good an editor your first day on the job as on your last; you're not developing some unique and profound gift.

But publishing has changed in many ways, and one of them is that these days many editors don't edit. There are editors now who basically make deals; they have assistant editors or associate editors who do the actual editing for them. When I was growing up in the business, editors, even if they were heads of publishing houses, tended to edit what they brought in, or they had someone who worked with them who could help them. Now it's much more splintered, and the business of publishing has become far more complicated and fierce and febrile.

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On the other hand, one has to remember that the time I look back on as the golden age was seen by people like Alfred Knopf as the age of the slobs, as opposed to prewar publishing, which was the *true* golden age. At a certain point you have to face the fact that you've turned into an old fart—that you can't tell whether the zeitgeist has actually changed for the worse or whether you've simply fallen behind and aren't in touch anymore.

—**Larissa MacFarquhar**

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Two Poems by Jeredith Merrin

The Shadow Plant

The plant etched on the wall sits in its pot
as calm as anything—
as any thing not

human. The cars sough by, less frequent than at day.
If I switched off the light
again, I'd see again how they

trace ghostlike, restless lights across the walls,
emblems of human hunger.
The old wood mantle-clock calls

someone, me, to task—more briskly than a heart.
The shadow clearly forms a parrot, perched
on the edge of the pot,

its head turned to the right—above it, on one side,
a stem with paired leaves stretching out like arms,
and on the other side

a single leaf shaped like a heart.
Perfectly composed and colorless,
it mocks what it is not.

The errorless bird is absolutely still,
having no need to stir or speak at all,
not being in need of a mate, or hungry, or real.

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Dream-View of Delft

in memory of Elizabeth Bishop

In Vermeer's "View of Delft,"
we down our dry manhattans,
our feet up comfortably
inside the seventeenth century
on plastic-webbed American
lawn loungers; we chat and smoke.

We are in the painting
without disturbing the painting,
drinking without alcoholism
or self-loathing. I'm not sure
what we're talking about—
this and that, relaxed.

We are together but separate,
the way the gold strand in the left foreground
is a version of a shadow
of the gray cloud overhead:
foreboding seen as light—

or the way the sketchy two
female figures in the painting
stand almost but not touching,
dressed in black. And too,
doubled, the red-brick Delfts,
one in, one out of water.

Everything is meeting
and not meeting in the dream,
or in the painting. Sun
inches up the red-brick
buildings here, Elizabeth.
And which Delft now is real?

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Four Poems by Timothy Liu

The Size of It

I knew the length of an average penis
was five to seven inches, a fact
I learned upstairs in the stacks marked 610
or HQ, not down in the basement
where I knelt inside a toilet stall, waiting
for eight and a half inches or more
to fill my mouth with a deeper truth. The heart
grows smaller, like a cut rose drying
in the sun. I was only fourteen back then,
with four and three quarters inches
at full erection. I began equating
Asian with inadequate, unable
to compete with others in the locker room
after an icy swim (a shrivelled
bud between my fingers as I tried to shake
some semblance of life back into it).
Three times a day, I jacked off faithfully, yet
nothing would enlarge my future, not
ads for vacuum pumps, nor ancient herbs. Other
men had to compensate, one billion
Chinese measured against what? Some said my cock
had a classical shape, and I longed
for the ruins of Greece. Others took it up
the ass, reassuring in their way,
yet nothing helped me much on my knees at night
praying one more inch would make me whole.

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Reading Whitman in a Toilet Stall

A security-man who stood, arms crossed, outside
the men's room (making sure that no one lingered)
met my eyes with the same dispassionate gaze as
a woman inside, kneeling to clean the toilets.

The faintly buzzing flicker of fluorescent light
erased the contours of a place where strangers
openly parade their sex. Efficient, silent,
all ammonia and rubber gloves, she was in and

out of there in minutes, taking no notice
of the pocket Whitman that I leafed my way through
before the others arrived. *In paths untrodden, /*
In the growth by margins of pondwaters, / Escaped

from the light that exhibits itself—how those words
came flooding back to me while men began to take
their seats, glory holes the size of silver dollars
in the farthest stall where no adolescent went

unnoticed. O daguerreotyped Walt, your collar
unbuttoned, hat lopsided, hand on hip, your sex
never evading our view! how we are confined
by steel partitions, dates and initials carved

into the latest coat of paint, an old car key
the implement of our secret desires. *Wanted:*
Uncut men with lots of cheese. No fats. No femmes.
Under twenty a real plus. How each of us must

learn to decipher the erotic hieroglyphs
of our age, prayers on squares of one-ply paper
flushed daily down the john where women have knelt
in silence, where men with folded arms stand guard

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while we go about our task, our tongues made holy
by licking each other's asshole clean, shock of sperm
warm in our mouths, white against the clothes we wear
as we walk out of our secrets into the world.

Nothing but the Truth So Help Me God

Nine lamps in the shape of teeming censers
hung from a courthouse ceiling, forty
wooden chairs facing a video screen.
This is America. Jury duty
and the token fanfare of breaking
from our daily routines, men and women
with baskets of tropical fruit on top
of their heads. Justice for all and some time
off. Dionne Warwick in a floor-length gown
not singing. Trying to hook her fans instead
on the Psychic Friends Network: *Touch me
not for I have not yet dialed that 1-
900 number.* America, talk
to me. The clock stops ticking, but someone
still keeps holding a microphone to our lips.

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Rest Stop, Highway 91

Cars parked alongside a chain-link fence
overlooking houses that have no view,
plates from three bordering states aglow
in the light from a hillside billboard
filled with a glass of milk—Holyoke
just beyond the notch, slumbering
like a rain-soaked paper on the porch—
checkout boys from the local A&P
hanging up their aprons, clocking out
on a night that is young only once
in a stranger's car—the taste of skin
on clandestine tongues, freckled swirls
down creamy backs in constellations
left unnamed, stiff cocks under boxers
crammed into that vinyl dark perfumed
by a four-inch cardboard pine dangling
above the illuminated dash, windows veiled
with frost. They say the leaves will fall
earlier this year, like so many apples
plastered on the hill, wooden barrels
filling up with rain while children turn
in their sleep—deaf to the sound of engines
running, their fathers behind the wheel.

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Two Poems by James Cummins

Sestina

He wanted to tell her the weekend idea was 'neat,'
But he kept hearing himself repeat the word 'funny.'
She named the names of trees, flowers: *sycamore*, *tulip*.
He asked her who did she think she was, Gary Snyder?
Above the car, then over the hotel, the spring moon
Was full, orange. 'This isn't just another fling,'

She said suddenly. 'Don't dare think it's some fling.'
The Jack Daniels arrived, hers on the rocks, his neat.
'I didn't think that at all.' Behind her, the moon
Looked away. She fretted. 'I just—I feel funny.'
Amazingly, it occurred to him something Gary Snyder
Once said was appropriate. He repeated it. 'Tulips,'

She smiled back. 'Let's take a walk through the tulips.'
Later, they didn't make love. She was shy. Some fling,
He brooded. Did she really think he *liked* Gary Snyder—
That he, too, thought he had it all summed up in a neat
Little package? Funny, he groaned. Worse than funny.
I get it all right for once: drinks, room, even the moon

Cooperates. How often can you count on a spring moon
Slipping through the sycamores, picking out the tulips
In the night air? She should feel romantic, not 'funny'!
Lying next to her, he felt so restless, eager to fling
His body atop hers—seeking, yet in control, his need
Ascetic, sensual, yet poised—a suburban Gary Snyder . . .

In the dark, she teased: 'Thinking about Gary Snyder?'
Then: 'I'm not so shy now.' He thought about the moon,
And a Grace Paley character who 'liked his pussy neat.'

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Then she was touching him, needing him, her two lips
Soft flowers, emissaries of her body, softly ruffling
Against him, moving him, so powerfully it wasn't funny . . .

Afterward, they were awkward, shy, trying to be funny.
They couldn't get any more mileage out of Gary Snyder.
'Some fling,' he said, and she flung back, 'Some fling!'
But mostly they were quiet. Outside, the big yellow moon
Yawned. He made a mental note to send her some tulips.
She stared out the window, thinking about the word 'neat.'

• • •

He remembered how she'd fling her hair. And the moon . . .
It was *finito*. Next week he got a book by Gary Snyder
In the mail. That was funny. He sent her the tulips.

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An *Ars Poetica* for You

This is what I love, the charged moment,
the moment of revelation, intimacy,
the words in italics. To let someone know
what it is one wants, or needs, or is:
this is what I long to describe to you,
though scared, suddenly alone in the world,
the cold wind of the spaces between us
blowing through me as a raw afternoon
blows through wet laundry. This is what I am,
then, a line of old socks, pajamas,
underwear dancing in the grayness like
Matisse's cut-outs of the last years,
a spot of color here, a likely form there,
yet it is the old man's gaiety I feel,
watching as the world recedes from him.
There is pleasure in this, and wisdom;
still, it is the movement of declining life,
no longer presenting to his beloved
his fear. And so I turn back to you
declining that pleasure, that wisdom, though
the effort to reach you is so enormous
I arrive gasping, my head on your thigh
the head of a drowning man, a shipwrecked man
who could be saved by you but who appears
to you only in the grayest of light.
He counterfeits himself to look true,
who knows that at the beginning of love
one imitates the beginning, the infant need;
that a spot of color, a likely shape is all;
and that his voice may not sound pleasing
as he whispers his urgency to you: *Do*
that. Do it that way. Oh god, that way.

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Two Poems by Stephen Leeds

Unsound

No island is a man
lonely on all four sides
with the door left unknocked

and the bell left unrung,
waiting to be finished
with the wait so heavy

like the non-beat of a
bass drum, silent in its
unrest. The sound

rings steady upon
the unsoliciting shores.

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In the Round

One evening at the station
I saw the circle-man
walking his shape,
reeling the same radius.
Over and over
he retraced his steps
in his dizzying delirium,
reciting the train schedule
and snapping his fingers.
He took to conducting his ring
which buzzed in everyone's ears.
He took to conducting his ring
and snapping his fingers,
reciting the train schedule
in his dizzying delirium.
He retraced his steps
over and over;
reeling the same radius,
walking his shape.
I saw the circle-man
one evening at the station.

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J.C. Todd

Men Kissing

Men kissing, men kissing men in a movie,
women kissing, kissing women in the next,
then men kissing women, then women, men,

lips swelling into sexual pout,
tongues like petals in storm whorling
on a screen in the basement

of the Methodist Church. Not porn, not instruction
but an ancient lesson—adoration,
how the mouth without words is made holy.

In the diner after the movies, men kissing,
a blonde and a redhead. Over rhubarb pie and coffee
I'm imagining the redhead kissing me.

It's good, as good as any lover,
lips so full I want to gloss them with crimson,
signalling to ruin, *Pass over here*.

In the shiny metal wall, I glimpse a smeary face,
my own, blurred enough it could be my brother's
leaning toward our father, ready for a bedtime kiss.

My brother, little, kissing our father,
my brother, grown, kissing our father.
Every night of the life they've lived together,

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Father leaning back in the rocker, tilting his head,
his mouth toward his son, son leaning down,
thin lips pursed, his nose, so like Mother's,

brushing Father's nose,
his stubbled chin brushing Father's stubbled chin,
the two of them, homophobic and affectionate,

saying goodnight with a kiss as soft
as the first kiss of the men in the movie, the men
in the diner, soft as kisses I have given or received.

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Portfolio

The Bivalves

Judy Pfaff

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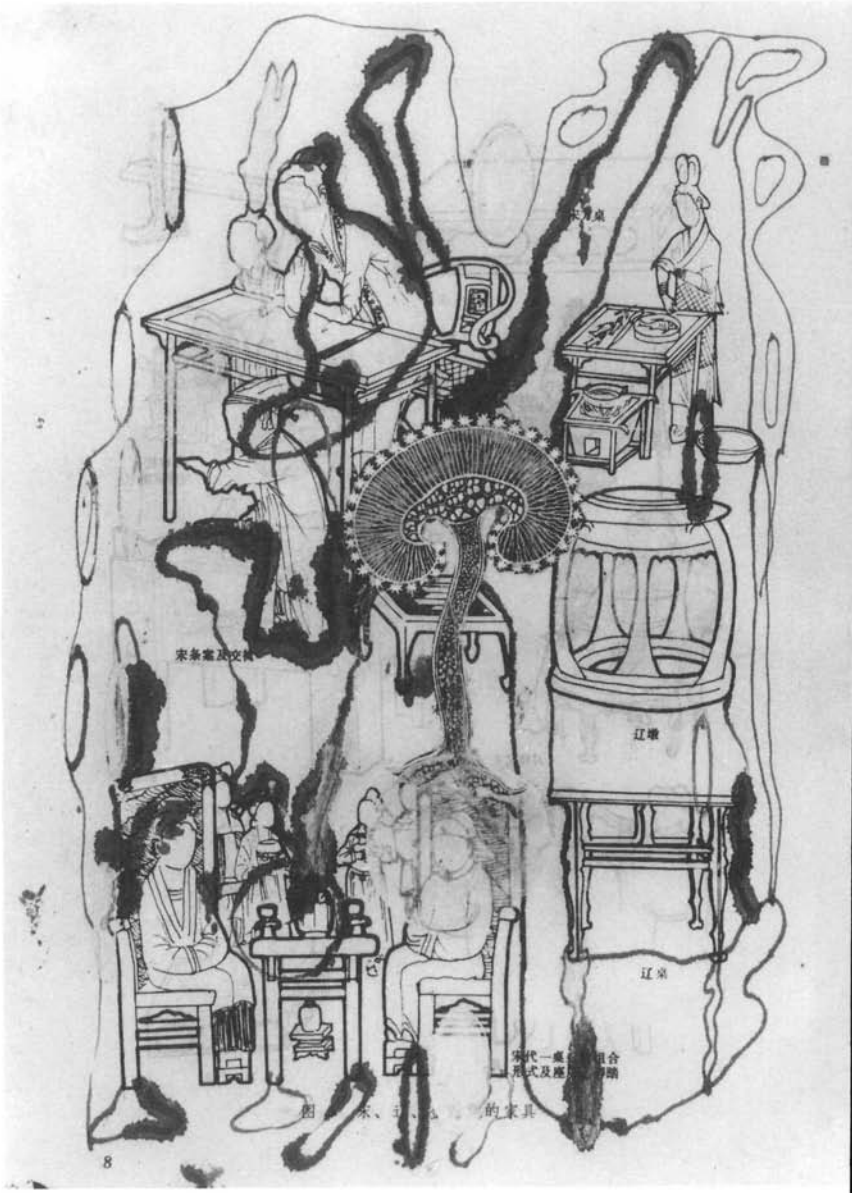

宋代一桌[illegible]组合
形式及座[illegible]

图[illegible]宋、辽[illegible]的家具

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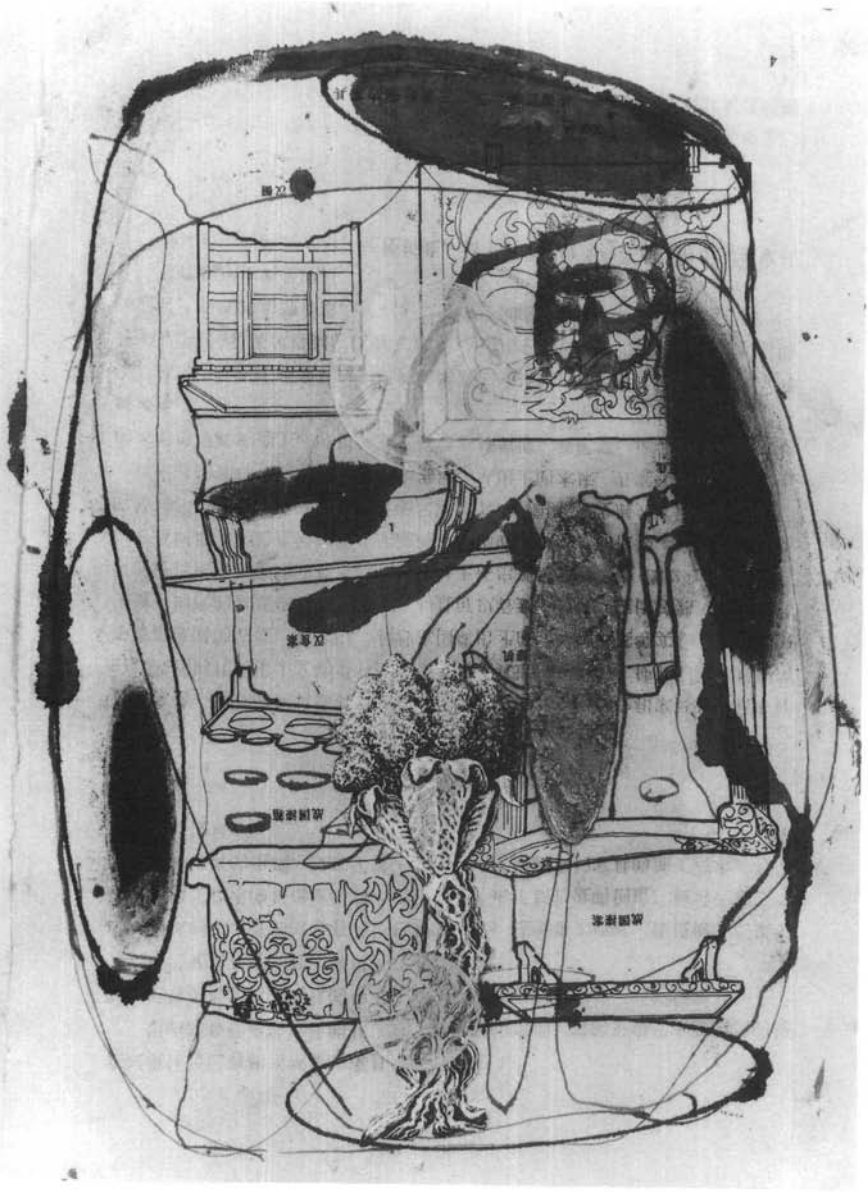

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図版 11 三屋登八図

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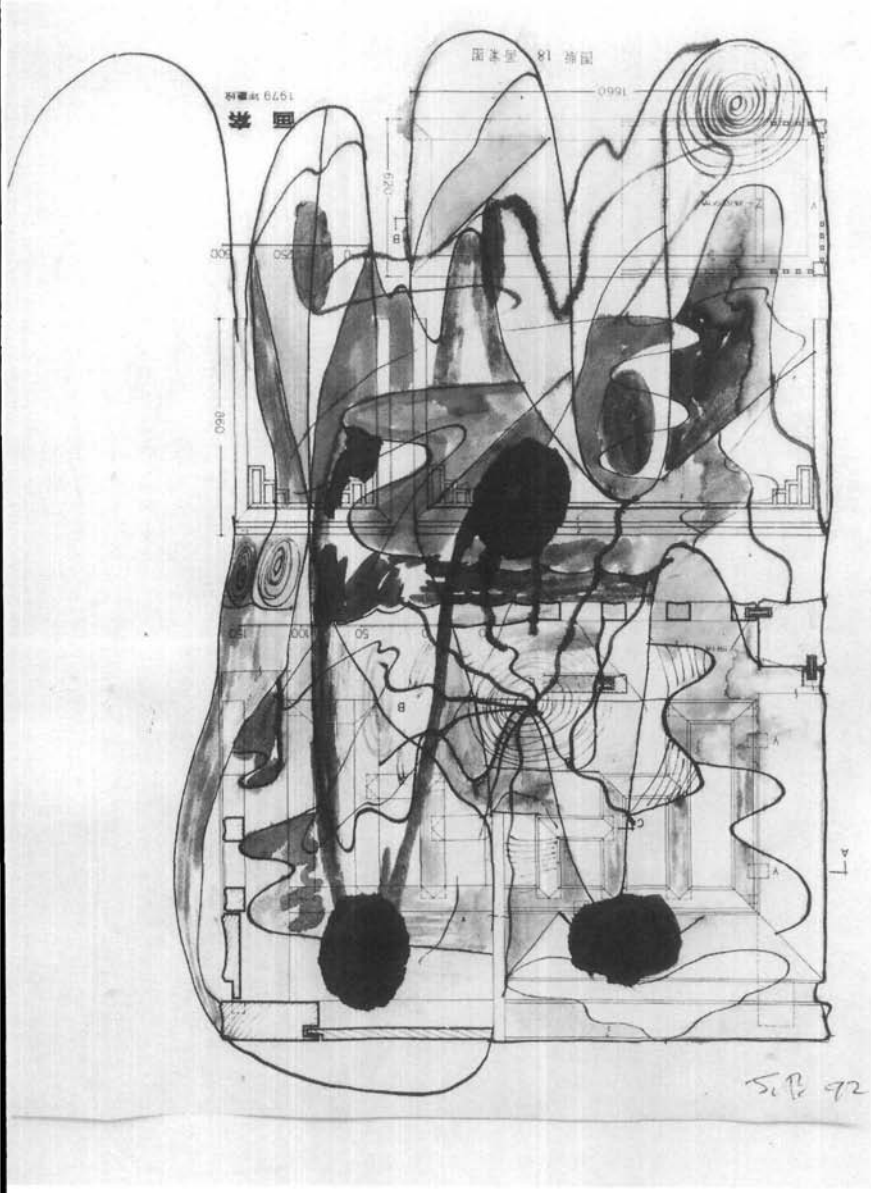

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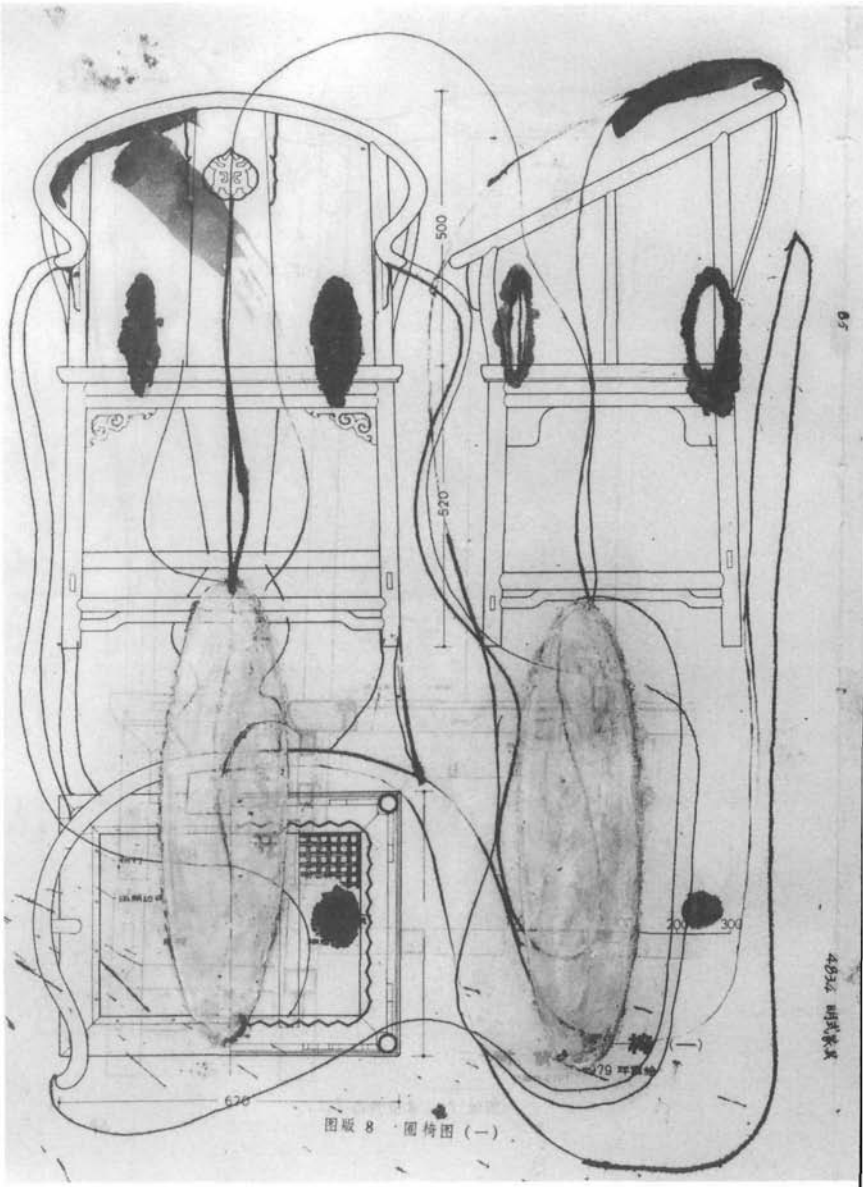

图版 8　圈椅图（一）

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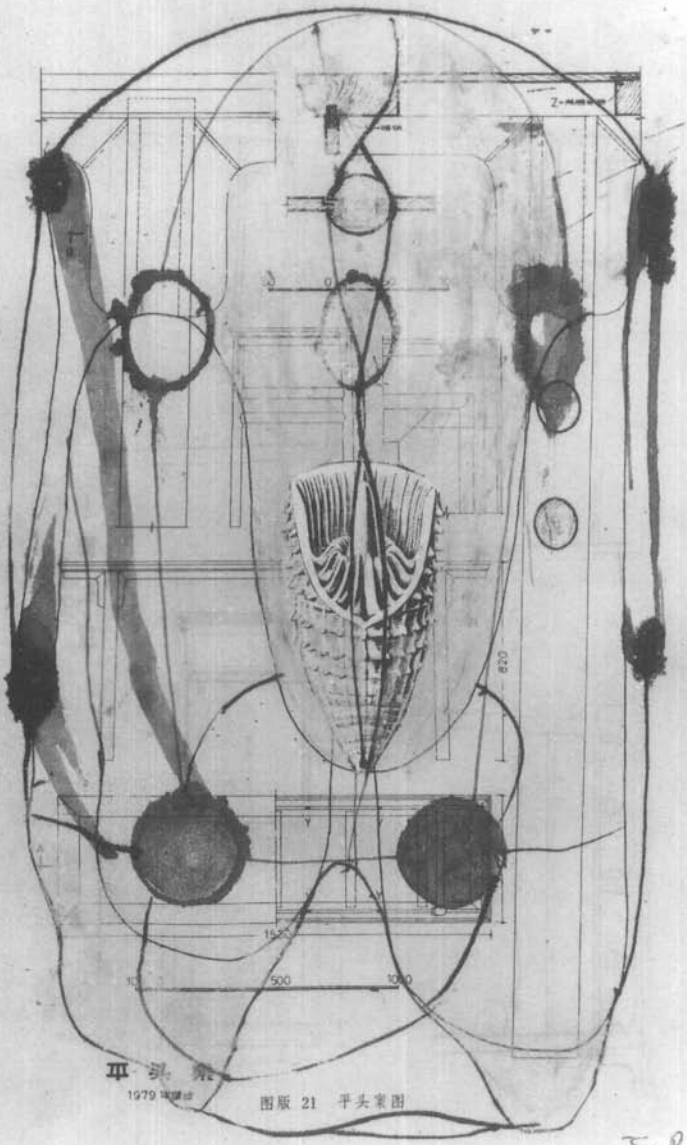

图版 21　平头案图

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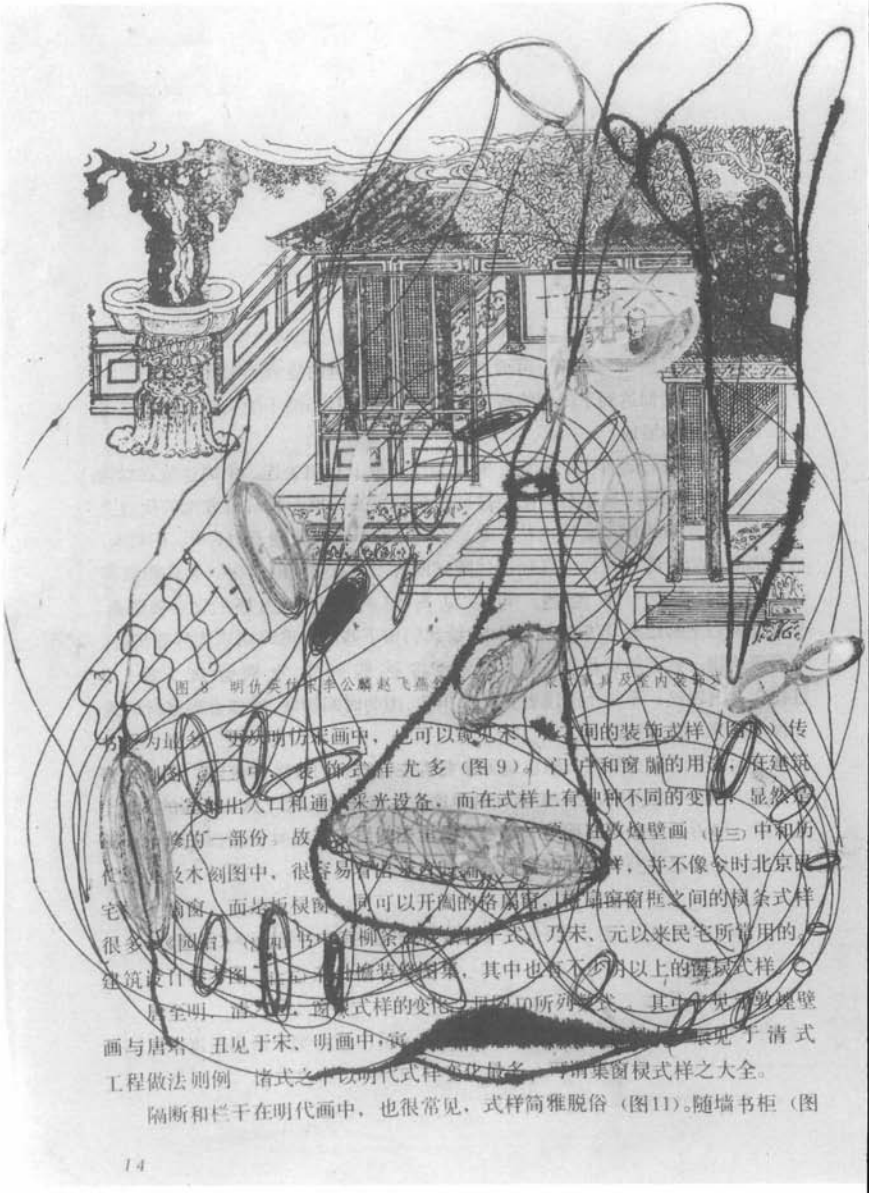

图 8　明仇英绘《李公麟赵飞燕外传》（局部）及室内家具

均为此类。从明仿宋画中，也可以看见宋代室内的装饰式样（图9）。传世宋画中，窗的式样尤多（图9），门户和窗牖的用法，在建筑上一般出入口和通风采光设备，而在式样上有种种不同的变化，显然它是建筑的一部份。故宋代壁画（图三）中和明仿宋画中，很容易看出窗的式样，并不像今时北京民宅的一般窗，而类似现代可以开阖的格风窗，比较墙窗窗框之间的棂条式样很多。明代《三才图会》书中所绘柳条窗式样，乃宋、元以来民宅所常用的。在建筑设计参考图集中，也搜集窗式样，其中也有不少明以上的棂窗式样。（图12）至明、清代，窗棂式样的变化，如图10所列举者。其中有见于敦煌壁画与唐塔，且见于宋、明画中，……见于清式工程做法则例。诸式之中以明代式样变化最多，可谓集窗棂式样之大全。

隔断和栏干在明代画中，也很常见，式样简雅脱俗（图11）。随墙书柜（图

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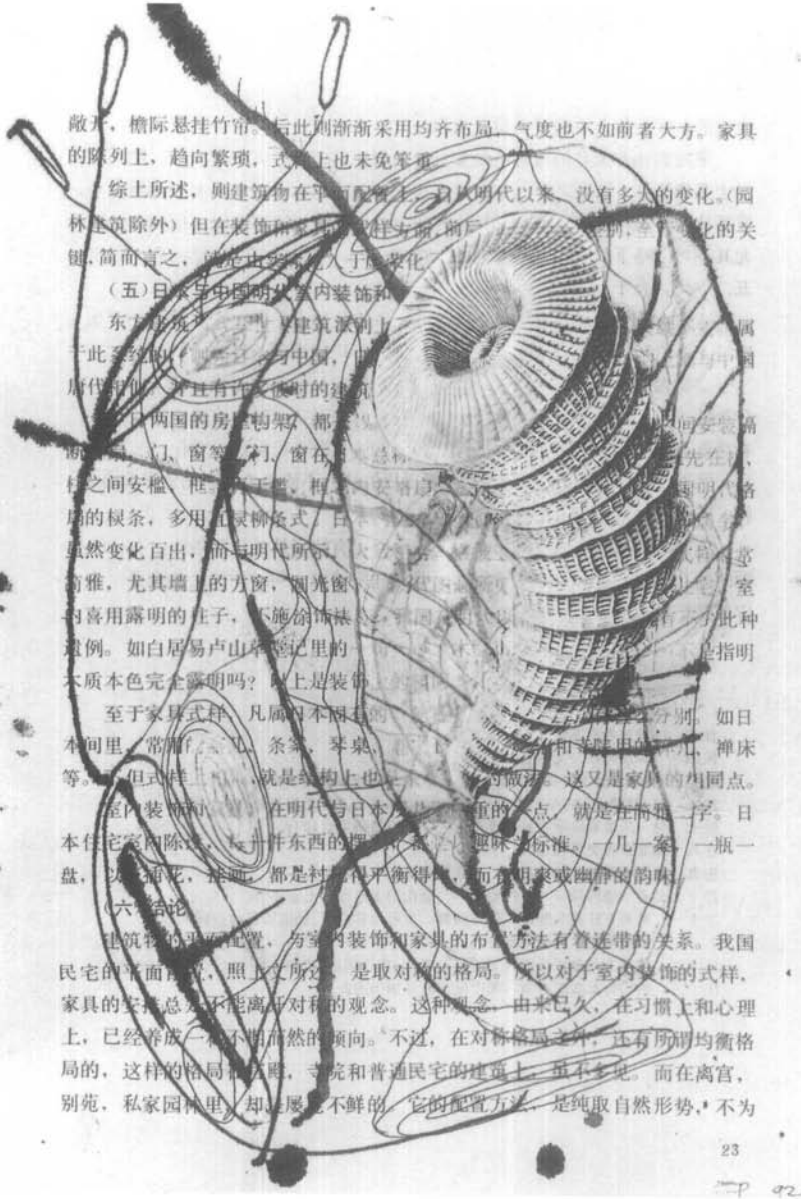

敞开，檐际悬挂竹帘。后此则渐渐采用均齐布局，气度也不如前者大方。家具的陈列上，趋向繁琐，式样上也未免笨重。

综上所述，则建筑物在平面配置上，自明代以来，没有多大的变化。（园林建筑除外）但在装饰和家具陈设方面，前后……化的关键。简而言之，前者由……于后者。

（五）日本与中国明代室内装饰和

东方建筑……建筑法则上……同于此……中国，……中国唐代……并且有许多相……

……两国的房屋构架，都……间安装……门、窗等……门、窗在……先在……柱之间安槛，……于墙。柱……格扇的棂条，多用……式样，……虽然变化百出，……明代所……堂简雅，尤其墙上的方窗，……室内喜用露明的柱子，……此种建例。如白居易庐山草堂记里的……指明木质本色完全露明吗？……上是装饰。

至于家具式样，凡属……别，如日本间里，常用……和……几、禅床等。……但式样……就是结构上也……这又是家具……同点。

室内装饰……在明代与日本……重的一点，就是在简……序。日本住宅室内除……与……件东西的摆……趣味……标准。一几一案，一瓶一盘，……插花，挂画，都是衬……得平衡得……而有……或幽静的韵味。

（六）结论

建筑物的平面配置，与室内装饰和家具的布置方法有着连带的关系。我国民宅的平面配置，照上文所述，是取对称的格局。所以对于室内装饰的式样，家具的安排总是不能离开对称的观念。这种观念，由来已久，在习惯上和心理上，已经养成一种不自觉的倾向。不过，在对称格局之外，还有所谓均衡格局的，这样的格局在……寺院和普通民宅的建筑上，虽不多见，而在离宫，别苑，私家园林里，却是屡见不鲜的。它的配置方法，是纯取自然形势，不为

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Vistas

Peter LaSalle

My wife stopped weeping just before the real-estate agent met us. We were on our way to see another model home. It had become a Sunday afternoon ritual for us, and by this point we could probably recite to each other the details of it all as if it were the stuff of a recurrent dream: there would always be a gold or royal blue blazer for the slim, middle-aged woman with her hair in a perfect rinsed coif, spiked heels; there would always be a cushiony Town Car, though maybe a DeVille, and there would always be brass plaques on the dash for sales awards; there would always be the two of us, me in the front passenger's seat, my wife in the back. The tires padded along.

"I don't think we've been over here yet, to this development," my wife lied outright.

•

My wife liked such new model homes better than the older homes that the agents usually tried to tell us had so much "character." And, to be frank, I don't think we had seen this

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pocket on the outskirts of our supposed City of the Future before. (I used to think it was Dallas, or possibly Houston, but I'm not so sure anymore.) Here the streets were so new the asphalt was like the black velvet of a cocktail dress, bone-white curbing trimming the winding lanes. There was no grass yet, just the reddish loam, and the newly planted crape myrtles and the mimosas had stick-thin trunks, taped lower down like the fragile legs of racehorses. I got out of the car, the agent opened the door for my wife in back. The agent brushed something off the front of her skirt, adjusted the clipboard and big book with a vinyl cover under her arm, what told the complicated tale of financing and mortgage rates, loans from banks perpetually on the verge of being taken over by another more solvent out-of-state bank.

My wife looked around, and she said, "This is nice here." She wasn't lying this time. I knew she believed it.

•

The agent had some trouble with the key box, though it seemed the agent always had trouble with the key box. I always liked the idea of those contraptions: big like that, spray-painted silver to make them look like shiny padlocks, they seemed to be something exaggerated, maybe out of a fairy tale, and it was somewhat disappointing that there wasn't a set of huge frilled keys to open the lock, but just the small key to open it and another key inside. ("Keys inside of keys," my wife whispered in the 3:00 A.M. darkness of the bedroom at our own home the other night.) It took the agent some time, some fiddling, before the box finally fell open on its hinge like a split coconut.

"I'm never good with these things," the frozen-coiffed woman said, smiling.

"I suppose they can get tricky," I told her, part of the routine. I looked over to see how my wife was holding up, but she seemed okay. "At least it's not a combination," I said.

"Combination what?" the agent asked me. She had an awful

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lot of glossy scarlet lipstick, an awful lot of glittery blue eyeshadow.

"You know, the usual combination locks they sometimes have on these. All those numbers and spinning the dial." She looked right at me. "I've never been any good at those things myself—" I knew she detected my nervousness, and I could have stammered "—never any good since the padlock with the combination in junior high, you know, what you have on your hall locker, maybe on your gym locker too." I was sweating. But maybe I read too much into her response, and she simply smiled. My breathing returned, easier.

There was afternoon sunlight printing parallelograms on the slate wall-to-wall carpeting in the enormous living room. In the kitchen there was a white island for the white stove and cooking counter, there were miles of white cabinets; the kiln-tile floor was very red, and everything in there smelled as new as the inside of a car you bought the day before. The agent told us there was a unit for the air-conditioning/heating big enough to allow for several additions to the house, and there were dozens of closets and dual-paned insulating glass in all the windows.

She talked about the local school district.

•

My wife and I did what we usually did when we got to a home like that. We went our separate ways. I liked to think that it traced back to when we were younger, before the kids, before a lot of things. Then, in college in the Eastern City (I think), our dating often took us to museums; back in those days museums provided a good free place to spend some time if you didn't have the money for a film. The city had a few museums to choose from. There was the famous main one with the central marble staircase within, the cozy other one that was long ago established by a rich dowager who wanted it to look exactly like a Venetian courtyard, and the rather hip other one—maybe the best—of poured concrete, totally

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devoted to the very new and avant-garde. What I remember is that they all had honey-varnished wood floors, and my wife and I back then, yes, liked to go our separate ways to look at the paintings in silence and alone, which is the only way to look at them, anyway: pictures are dreams, otherworlds to be tiptoed in and out of alone, because even if you are with others you are always alone in dreams. Aren't you? I can remember the fine moment that came after each of us had looped the labyrinthine ways, past more pseudo-classical canvases the size of billboards or more post-modern sculptures whacked into shape out of slabs of car fenders, the best part was always finding my way back to her. To check room after room and finally come upon her as she sat on one of the black upholstered benches in the empty gallery of white walls and paintings, maybe her pencil and little spiral-bound notebook in hand (our museum-visit dates sometimes were prompted by a "looking assignment" she had for a fine-arts class) and know I had *found* her again. And, as I said, now we set off on our separate ways to look around this model home, needing no more encouragement than the agent telling us that we would surely enjoy the "vistas" and her adding that this particular model home was not just a loss leader for the development; it was available immediately, and with the right financing papers a closing could be settled within a couple of weeks.

•

Or maybe it wasn't like that at all.

Maybe in that model home this happened.

Sure, there were fine vistas. The house sat on a small loamed knoll, so from one of the back upstairs bedrooms I could see over the lower rooftops of other new homes to some gentle hills, all bottle-green cedar and patches of blindingly white caliche. I stared that kind of staring in which you have no idea how long you are staring—five minutes, a half hour, who knows. (Or as a guy I work with, a guy a couple of desks with blank-faced terminal screens down from my desk with

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a blank-faced terminal screen, as he said the other day, "Time, now that's a laugh, isn't it.") I went into the front upstairs bedroom, the master bedroom, and it was true, beyond more houses and a fringe of trees I could see the ghostly spires of the city skyline, something right out of a vaguely realized science-fiction film, very far away. I stared. And here is where it turns tricky. Somewhere in that staring, or in that looking, or maybe just going from one of the rooms to another on my own in that model home, I *knew* a few things, as they say. *I knew here is where you maybe could have had a chance with it all, and in a model home like this your daughters would have been prettier, because prettiness does matter, your son wouldn't flunk out of four colleges, because . . .* But who was I kidding. I headed down the stairs—fast.

My wife wasn't there, the real-estate agent wasn't there. Nobody was there but me, more scared than ever. I fiddled with the stainless-steel faucets at the kitchen sink out of nervousness, and it was true what the agent had said: they were the best, there in the kitchen and in both of the bathrooms, washerless and, as the sticker proclaimed, guaranteed against annoying drips for a full ten years. I didn't need the sticker. I could tell just by the way they felt, the cushiony way the hot and then the cold turned off like that. The agent was right.

I heard footsteps—my wife's? the agent's?—though maybe I didn't hear footsteps.

Back at the agent's office, my wife appeared very relaxed, even happy. The agent looked older than she seemed at first—well preserved, with that overdosing of red lipstick and blue eyeshadow—and she gave us a load of brochures as we sat across from her at her desk. We both thanked her, my wife smiling that smile with the one front tooth overlapping the other that has always made her *her*. (In my dreams I sing to her soft, gallant songs, like this: "You were my Museum Girl with golden hair, translucent skin, my Museum Girl in bell-bottoms and a turtleneck, and I came to you very, very quietly, my Museum Girl, I was the Wanderer, and I found you sitting

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there.") Later that night we watched television, we listened to the weatherman. Of course we have no intention of buying any new home.

•

Later still, in the darker-than-darkness of our bedroom, our bed, I try to tell my wife about how I stared out those windows, how I looked through the twin-paned insulating glass at what the real-estate agent called those vistas for who knows how long. But she turns away from me. Bruskly. Heartbreakingly.

"You bastard," is all she says, before she starts weeping, as usual.

I know what she means. All that time until next Sunday can be so goddamn long.

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Victoria Schlegel

Like Unnatural Words

gray ubiquitous gray pigeons in the dark
the wide moon pale long sacral pinnacles
flying buttresses a tower curved puissant
in autumn the hereafter riverbanks balustrades
trees façades broad long steps an arch
edifices bridges colonnade the stone corpus
an orb a crag pediments platforms obelisk
sculpture statues squares and quadrangles
spheres columns volumes galleries blocks
courts awnings avenues portals gates
quays stalls bridges triangles spires
gargoyles festoons façades corbels façades
gardens walls domes peristyles palimpsests
balconies fountains basins parvis motifs
pendents alcoves pilasters tracery squares
panels doors niches garlands keystones
gargoyles columns cornices turrets trees
chimneys palimpsests lamp posts lace gates
crosses towers courtyards arches pikes
parapets pedestals pylons fountains corbels
gardens figures friezes busts reliefs
walls alcoves cupolas porticoes parvis
embankments bridges balustrades tracery steps
doors lanterns wrought iron windows trees
façades doors niches louvers slats
lamp posts benches brick basin a belfry
chimneys alleys edifices garlands lace
windows casements sills a doorway an arch
billowing lambent dawn crag gray forged
gold vague red moving with the surface Paris

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Stewart James

Vanessa

Andrew works in the kitchen. He's going
to get me out of here.

My boyfriend doesn't believe me.
—my *ex* boyfriend. Andrew's gone
to N.Y. he says.

But I know Andrew's here waiting
for his chance.

• • •

The pretty woman told me I'm going
to be one-on-one. She means Andrew
is going to be here and we will sleep together.

I call the black woman with the thermometer
witchdoctor in a friendly way.
I try to get information out of her about my
one-on-one with Andrew.

She took me to a closet and gave me
a nightgown and made me take a shower
to prepare for Andrew.

The skinny girl comes and garbles
in my room because she knows
about my one-on-one.

It makes me jealous she knows about it.

• • •

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The strange doctor and nurse still might want
to kill me so I have to scream all night my father
has a gun and he's in the mafia.

Through the walls I can hear Andrew leading
them in homosexual activity in the male dorm.

The strange opening in the wall is because they perform
abortions and cut people up.
They slide the parts through the hole
into the quiet room.

Every time they plan to hurt me I say restricted
area restricted area restricted area over and over.

• • •

My boyfriend came today.
He's really innocent.
It's not his fault at all.
I told him how I saw Larry in the window
across the yard.
He laughed at that what ward is that? he said.

But he doesn't have to believe me. I *did* see Larry.
Playing chess in the window.

My boyfriend said it must be the spielers' ward then.
Spielers that's what he calls chess players.
He beats Andrew.
Andrew's afraid of him.
Andrew's afraid of his *masculinity*.

• • •

Monday I get out of here.
My boyfriend says they're lying to me.

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He says I'll be in for weeks I'm not ready.
But he doesn't *know*.

He gets me mad. I don't listen to him.
He says the best he can do for me is tell the truth
because I depend on him for contact with *reality*.
He says I'm "delusional."

It's because he comes from
a perfect family.

• • •

My wedding to Andrew is on TV.
The queen of England is there.

The witchdoctor took me to the smoking room
and I saw someone from Andrew's organization
to take care of me.
I said you're my psychiatrist I sat next to him.
I told him take off your glasses you look more macho
and he did then he was shaking because he thought
I was so beautiful.

In the room I found the magazine about all the things
Andrew is going to buy me.

I read it over and over it makes me feel special.

• • •

Every day I leave some food on my plate so
Andrew will know I'm getting his messages.

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My boyfriend asks is Andrew feeding
me well? He confuses me
but he's so *funny*.
He admires how Andrew can attend medical classes
in N.Y. and work in the kitchen here at the same time.

I thought about that today but I know it's possible.

Andrew needs to accept he's *Jewish*.
I scared him because I'm obsessed with Jews.
But that's why I love him because
he's so *vulnerable*.

He needs to get laid by a real
woman and take her up the ass.

• • •

They took me to ACT team but they were stupid.
Lock up for an hour then 5 minutes to smoke
a cig but they made a big mistake they forgot
to take out the mirror.
Then I knew my biological mother was a mental
patient and was raped.

I stared in it and screamed about my mother.

• • •

Larry came with my *ex* today.
They asked did I see them spieling up in the window
last night. They laughed.
They were trying to *hurt* me.

Anyway, they were trying to cover up something.
I didn't ask them because
with the haldol you don't feel like talking.

Then I figured out—they couldn't actually *say*—
they were giving me a message from Andrew.

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That was *sweet*.

I introduced them to my new friend Polly.
She gives me cigs which my boyfriend doesn't approve.

She got pregnant on the ward. Right on the floor.
Her boyfriend watched too and said he was going
to break up with her. He's Lawrence my psychiatrist.

It's true, she's a slut. She does it with
everybody.

We're not supposed to do it.
If they catch you they put you in quiet hour.

• • •

Tonight Andrew was outside arguing to see me.
Everyone was real nervous.
But no his mother won out.
She's a heavyweight in the N.Y. Jewish mafia.

I can't find out what kind of ring Andrew is buying me.

We are going on a cruise and everybody
is going to turn a leaf for the better.

• • •

When my boyfriend comes I'll ask him for $.
I don't tell him it's for cigs. He complained to Karen
the social worker about me smoking he says it's proof
I'm not getting care.
But Lawrence smokes.

When I have cigs everyone likes me better.
Otherwise they think I'm a *spy*.

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I'll tell him I need $ for the phone.
Sometimes I call him but you can't hear
because of the baseball baseball baseball.

• • •

I know Andrew is watching in the kitchen.
Andrew *hates* baseball but he watches for me.
My boyfriend says that's not true but I know
Andrew only *pretends* to like it to appear more *masculine*.

He's in love with my boyfriend.

But he's afraid.

My boyfriend says Andrew's not controlled by the Jewish
mafia but I can tell the games are fixed.
He asks how do I know?
He's just testing me.

• • •

The other attendant has the power to protect Andrew.
I imitated Egyptian prayer and prayed to him
but the fat female attendant came into my room.
I told her stay out she was de-evolved and will get AIDS.
Then I pushed her.

They put me into the quiet room and said if I didn't calm
down they would four-point me.
I started banging on the door yelling four-point
four-point four-point.
They brought a bed and arm and leg restraints.
They tied me I was terrified.
I screamed for Andrew I said is my doctor.
The Chinese doctor gave me a high injection of haldol.

They didn't even tell me *why*.

• • •

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I figured it out about the ACT team. It's where they
bring the girls to protect them from an abortion.
They all have big bellies.

Lawrence is the abortionist.
He has to do it or the mafia
will kill him.

• • •

Today I heard the songs on the radio go on longer
than normal and I knew Andrew is coming for me.

But it's too late for Jackie kidnapped by Onassis
against her will. I told everyone sell Getty sell Getty
because that's his company.
I heard reporters outside and helicopters
I said I *don't want publicity*.

I had to be *firm* with them.

• • •

They don't get it at all.
The mafia controls the hospital I'm planning
my revolt from the ACT team. I keep telling
Chris you are big and strong Chris we could
take over the hospital.

I have him convinced but at 4:00 he brought me
back here *as if nothing was changed*.

• • •

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The mafia told my parents where I am.
I am going to make them sorry for that.
I said they are de-evolving and will get AIDS
if they don't divorce and marry the right people.

My father can because some woman
in his past but my mother can not and she will
de-evolve and die from AIDS.

• • •

My father called to say the good news someone
found my wallet and my account is okay.
It's because Andrew opened an account for me
and I will see him soon we will get married.

I didn't even know about it.

I am really happy.

Soon they will bring in people for their share
of mafia money and I will have to decide what they get.

But not *before*.
The Irish girl wants to get money *before*.

She was made to be a prostitute by Jews.
I told her about Kosher Houses which is a high-class
version of Met State to escape
the Jewish mafia or have an abortion.

That is if she's nice to me.

• • •

Every time I smoke Richard Gere gets it up the ass.

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I'm really worried for him. I don't finish
my cigarettes because *I don't want to hurt him*.

I told my boyfriend. He says what do they do
to him for 1/2 a smoke? He doesn't understand
my connection to Richard.

It's more than we *ever* had.

• • •

I used to call Andrew.
He always hung up on me but I would just stay
on the line for hours.
When he picked up his phone there I was!
I needed the *connection*.

But it was for his *protection*.

They didn't dare hurt him too much with me on the line.

Still I could hear them doing things to him.

• • •

At night I sit in the doorway of my room
(but I'm behind the white line so they can't say
anything about it). I talk about I don't want
to be rich so Lawrence doesn't think
I just want his $.

He smells of $ a *lot* more than Andrew.

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The black kid gave me a tape to listen on my boyfriend's
walkman. The song is How Will I Know.
It's a collaboration between Lawrence and Whitney for me.

It makes me in love with Lawrence and out
of love with Andrew.

• • •

Today they had a fancy meal chicken croquette
which I didn't eat so Lawrence doesn't think
I need a lot of $ or fancy food.

I find books all over the ward he wrote. One is called
The Greatest Things Since Sliced Bread and one is Come
Winter where the guy doesn't get the girl.

I think it means Lawrence is castrated.

I'm really freaked out about it.

I sat on my bed and started feeling I would die.
I was spinning and couldn't breathe.

• • •

My *ex* brought Edward. I told him *never* bring Edward.
He says Edward cares about me he's the best friend I have.

I hate Edward.

He didn't approve of the abortion.
He's so *judgmental.*

Edward makes me mad. I have good reasons.
He's such a queer!

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My boyfriend can *destroy* him. That's because
he knows his weakness.

But Edward threatens me.

He needs to get laid by a *real* woman.
Then he wouldn't be so weird.

• • •

Edward thinks my boyfriend is *God*.
Just like all his fanclub.
They all think he can do no wrong.

At first that made me mad but then I just *accepted* it.
When Edward called—like 6 X/day—we used to fool
around while we talked to him.
That was *perfect*.
It made me feel superior to Edward.
My boyfriend would talk and I suck him off
then I'd talk he took me from behind.

That's the only way to put Edward in place.

He *deserved* it.

• • •

Governer Dukakis told the doctor don't let me out.
It's because of the Kennedys. They control the doctors.
Ted Kennedy called Mike Dukakis and said
don't let me out.

That's why Joe Kennedy needs my help. He wants
to break away but he's unsure of himself. He tries
to get me out but his dad said no.

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Edward thinks he's an authority on the Kennedys.
He's such a *little boy*!

I don't think about how tiny his penis is because it makes me mad. You don't even know when it's *in*!

He's so insecure about it. I told him loosen up Edward.
He's trying to *compensate*
but I don't care.

What am I his babysitter?

• • •

I found out Lawrence is not castrated.
Now I'm relieved.
The black guy brought his radio on the porch
I danced with Lawrence.

He laughed at me because the haldol makes my body
frozen stiff like dancing with a coatrack.

All I wanted to do was feel him up to be sure
but he pushed away my hands. I begged him please
but he said go dance with Charles Iverson.

When he was lighting a cig I reached his crotch.
He didn't react so I just hung on.
Then he yelled get this girl away from me
but I wouldn't let go.

They put me in my room but I was happy.
I was happy for him.

• • •

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Sometimes I say good-bye Paolo after just 1 minute.

Besides, I'm always afraid my father's going to come.

My father says he wants to kill him.
Wally from Wallytham, that's what he calls
my father cause we're from Waltham.
Also Wally Walnut.
I remember everything my ex says.

Yesterday he saw everyone sitting in the hall facing
the big fan.
He said they should give us all flight goggles.

It's so *true*!
I can't laugh with the haldol but that was pretty funny.

I told Polly but she didn't get it.
She's obsessed with Lawrence.

• • •

I finally figured out what my boyfriend meant
about the goggles. They use the fan
to *control* us.

We're just an experiment with *deadly results*.

It works like hypnosis
so we don't *question*.

That's what they did to Polly.

She's smart she sleeps on the hallway floor.
They don't let her cause they know she's *safe* there.

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I tell everyone don't face
the fan but they don't listen.
I'm really angry about it.

When I get out I'll sue.

• • •

Sometimes I sit in front of the fan so they won't
find out I know about it.
It works sexually.

That's why they don't let you have sex.
They check on you so you don't masturbate.

That way they have *control*.

That's why they give you haldol.

Richard Gere wants to have sex with me *telepathically*
but I can't because the haldol.

• • •

I'm really frustrated the Jewish mafia
controls us with a fan.

I asked my boyfriend why he said that thing
about the goggles.
I *had* to know even though I already know.

He said *static flight*.

He means it's *electrical*. That is, the *control*.

• • •

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[Vanessa wrote nothing further in her diary until after her release, when her mania returned and she filled several notebooks. I document here only entries registered during her internment. She wrote the following after her return to supervised care. — ED.]

Mr. Castration J.K. put me back here.

They brought me paper to write a confession
about me and Richard so Mr. Castration
can have me to himself.

The haldol is so I can't write letters because my arm
is too stiff
but if I don't swallow they rape Richard.

• • •

My father and mother showed up. I refused
to see them they finally went away.
I said *they are not my parents*.

They came back later. That was so immature.

I told them *you are not my parents*.
Then I cooled it to show the mafia I am levelheaded.

My mother said the man I threw tea in his face is okay.
She was making me really mad. I told her he is not
okay he is not okay.

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Everyone on the Wil Shriner show was getting
scared which is bad because that's what leads us
into nuclear war all of a sudden this strong wind came
into the porch because of the bombs.
I told the operator tell everybody
but she hung up.

Finally they gave me something to help sleep.

• • •

Paolo my old boyfriend stopped in.
All the way from Argentina or wherever.
He brought me another teddy bear.
That was from Richard because Richard
was sending for me.

I was so angry Richard sent a teddy bear with Paolo.
I said you better not hurt Richard.

There will be *consequences*.

• • •

Paolo came back after ACT team.
The buzzer rang and I saw his face at the door and everyone
got up to get the attendant.

He brought me some bananas Mr. Nutrition.
He said we're a flock of butterflies.
Then I remembered that from the Bible.

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He said we flutter up when someone comes to the door
then settle in the same place
like butterflies on a rock.

He was being arrogant but I don't mind.

Later tonight I realized it was a message from Richard
nuclear war is averted for now.

I sat behind the white line and said butterflies
butterflies butterflies butterflies over and over
so no one would be frightened any more.

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Quotations from Chairman Flaubert

William Gass

I

Heinrich Zeitung Muller-Müller sat silently in the speeding cab and tried not to listen let alone overhear his wife complaining about the risk inherent in wet roads, about the traffic, heavy already, although it was early in the day, about the draft the driver had created by cracking his window, and the smoke of his cigarette which was inconsiderately circulating through the backseat before finding its way out into the street. "So you say," she said, though he had said nothing. She regularly read his mind as if it were in print, as so much of it unfortunately was; for if he had not written at such length about his life in East Germany he would not now be defending himself in the press, whose *schadenfreude* at the present turn of events was not sufficient to satisfy them. They wanted—their readers wanted—endlessly, more: more dirt, more tarnish to the silver of his reputation. On second thought, per-

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haps he should upgrade the image so that the gloss would be gone from something grander—gold. Gold, after all, was the metal in the medal he didn't get on account of the political imbroglio he found himself in, and dingy was indeed the life he now led. "See," his wife said, "it's just as I said: *they* can smoke up the taxi like a stupid tune on their radio, while *we* must sit and inhale it as if we were some bug on a bush being poisoned as a pest; but if *we* want to smoke in this public conveyance, *they'll* complain as if speaking for their lungs, and lah-dee-dah their concerns about cancer louder than the tinny tunes *they're* listening to."

The smoke, he thought, is trying to escape to the West. "The driver can hear you, dear," he tried to say mildly but sharply said. "He doesn't understand a word; they make no effort; *ich weiß nicht* is all they know in any language; isn't that the same shop we passed a while back? is he really taking us to the airport? these people are all alike, at least in New York they get lost now out of ignorance. In New York they drive their cabs straight off the boat and still think they're in Moscow or Cairo or someplace, and hang a left like they hung their last left-wing leader. But here, they think they know every cinder in the street. Look how he's shaving the paint from those parked cars; you'd think he was in the refinishing business." How, Heinrich Zeitung Muller-Müller wondered, was he supposed to sense the soul of society in the throes of its sweaty changes, when he spent his time holding his nose so he wouldn't hear his wife's laments which were, by now, as redolent with repetition as ripe cheese.

What was the appropriate quotation from Chairman Flaubert? *#12. Practical life is loathsome to me; the mere necessity of sitting down in a dining room at fixed hours fills my soul with a feeling of wretchedness.* Trapped in the taxi, inhaling his wife's words as he so often had to, Muller-Müller was nevertheless comforted by the verification which events were providing him. The Chairman was always correct. In a world where all the trees had been felled, Flaubert's stump was at least larger than the others. The cab shimmied down the off-ramp

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toward the airfield, and his wife squealed almost audibly. I guess I should thank god she's only imaginary, Muller-Müller thought; still, she does carry on like a cartoon. I'll have to do something to deepen her nature, even if that means giving in to the feminists. "I'm made-up, that's what you mean," his wife said, as if she were reading over his shoulder. "You can't pretend that reality is a fiction, just because you lie about life all the time." Oh, she would like to take the Chairman's place, if she were given the chance, and put her own pronouncements in his position of authority; but Muller-Müller was determined on that score. Of all the *cher maîtres*, Gustave was the *cher*iest.

The wipers wiped away, sort of smearily, and the rain pattered upon the roof of the cab, kind of gently, and his wife would be required to say as they slid to a stop in front of TWA: "Well, we left the States without an umbrella to our name, and it's rained the whole damn time we've been in Berlin, god, it's as gray here as Vienna is, and I thought Vienna was the grayest gray place I've ever been, and now we're going to get soaked again getting out of this car." Who said writing is the best revenge? What good is a revenge which has to be taken again and again like a photographer from the Press? a Press which had been particularly annoying, flashing their pans at his person, blocking his path, the lights laughing at the hat he held over his face. "So I suppose they'll all be here," his wife said, "waiting like worms in their moist spoil of dirt." It scarcely mattered to his wife that he made her out to be a nag. "Once I get going," she said, "you" (meaning Muller-Müller) "have nothing to say." He sat silently in the cab for a moment, fishing with his forefinger among his German change for pieces of the right size. Anything, a character (as the folksy old critics called it), or a situation, or a thought, a word, an expression like *German change*, might cause a text to turn a corner and disappear into significance, such as "the Unification of the *Reich*" — that was certainly a change, even if it was like remarrying your ex-wife. *Unification* — yes, there was a term which might scare the pants off most writers, and what were you

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supposed to do after your pants had been frightened into fleeing: run faster, screw, shower, sit on the stool? how long had it been since they had been unified, he and she? longer than Germany had been happily divorced; boy, some people learn none of the lessons of Heraclitus, namely, you can't marry the same woman twice, and expect to live any way after that except sappily.

Wait a minute. Was it wise to balance *expect* against *except* like that? and was the semi-hidden, "happily ever after" reference a bit glib? He could cut it from the text, of course, erase it from the page, but it would sit in his mind like a rut in the mud, telling his Present where his Past had been. Looking back (and when writing, as when reading, one was always looping back, returning to the beginning in order to find the end), looking back (*Looking Backward*—wasn't that the title of a utopian tract by Edward Bellamy?), looking back he wasn't sure he should have begun. Perhaps "metal of medal" was too cute. Was the tone right? What *was* the tone? soured gayety? cynicism through which, like lightning, there were flashes of hope?

He felt his wife's impatience like another passenger. She wouldn't get out of the car ahead of him, but would wait for her husband (he) to hold the door and hand her over the curb like a date at a dance. Where was women's lib when you needed it? Too many *h*s maybe in that previous line (how many? five? could be worse; nevertheless, watch out for alliteration, it will do you in). Flaubert bragged in—was it #35?—that in some recent work of his *There are only two or three repetitions of the same word which must be removed, and two turns of phrase that are still too much alike*. Where were the reporters he feared would be waiting, or did such things happen only in that other—that nearly unmentionable medium—the one in which photos of photographers photographing photogenic moments were so popular? ganging up on some guy as he comes out of court or emerges from a cab to tackle a staircase which has occupied its life collecting steps, mike in his mouth, the newsies following him tread after tread,

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hounding him, holding the hem of his trousers in their teeth, cameras aimed like Uzies, and that mesh-covered earmuff, initialed by a network, pushed in his face, the instrument to which he mutters, "No comment at this time," and so forth. "Are you going to get the bags," his wife commands. "No comment at this time," he says, then "*danke* something *schön*," I think, to the driver whose cigarette lets go its ash that instant on his valise: should he compare that small pale fall to the errant plop of some pigeon's poop or directly to the character and consistency of his consumed life?

Was the Chairman simply upset with the banal repetitions which make up day-to-day existence—in contrast with the belly dancers he observed in Egypt, where the rippling rolls of fat seemed freshly jiggled just for his tourist's eye? How different Constantinople and Damascus were from his tidy environment at Croisset, his blessed bachelor digs; but didn't he desire such a pallid, undemanding, day-to-day existence, so that his imagination might run undistracted and unimpeded to its goal? Because nothing interferes with creative work more than phones and children. The misery of millions is inspiring. A flat tire ruins the day. Louise Colet wanted to wring a little passion out of Gustave; she wanted to feel his heart ache for her; she, after all, was his true love, wasn't she? No. Of course not. A stupid question. Work was his one true love, of course, and her cunt a convenience. Can't be kind, and survive. Flaubert conferred his letters on her, a gift which Rilke's epistolary ladies understood far better than Louise, who was, after all, a dunce.

Couldn't I contrive a Croisset for myself in the Hamptons maybe, or on a street in Queens? a walk-up apartment over a pants-press store, possibly, where they'd never find me, neither newshounds nor police? Who would look for anyone to live in Queens who had any control over their fate, Heinrich figures. Or maybe the Chairman is concerned because the French language, so vowel heavy it will blow away in a Boche breeze, or be intimidated by a rapid and guttural polonaise, doesn't dare bear any more repetition than is already built into it—

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oh and ah and aay and eee everywhere like cattle lowing on the lea?

Dare / bear won't do at all. Am I searching for the right word here, or merely avoiding the wrong ones? Try *can't survive*. The French language can't survive any more repetition than is already built into it. Try *indigenous,* The French language can't survive any more repetition than is indigenous to it. Nice word: made of *us,* two *in*s and a *dig*. No wonder it strikes a basic bell. Yeah? well, what would really happen to French, the Frog's croak, in that case? Does French have a face that can turn green from eating too many *bon mots* a minute? You can't hurt language. It can absorb every stink-footed invader and turn them, in time, into model citizens. Sure, we should treat our own language well, for it is, after all, our only muse, but each of us has a somewhat different tongue. My American, my vocabulary, the syntax of my mind, is not the same as Frank Sinatra's, or anyone else you might mention. Henry James does not have the word *snot* in his vocabulary. No. Inaccurate. He knows what *snot* means. Probably he more than once thought, of a dramatic critic, "that snot-nose," but it is not a word one writes or utters. He is a gentleman. Dare we say, "of the old school"? He does not write sentences like "Geez, Louise, it's okay, play with yourself if you wanna."

We have to do more than differentiate between *langue* and *parole*. There is, of course, the historical language, packed in the volumes of its dictionaries, and there is that same language as it is used now. Within the current tongue, there are all the regionalisms and dialects, funny ethnic mixes, slanguage and the argot of the gangs. Then there is the speech of you and me, and if any one of us is to have a muse, and a source of inspiration, it will be shaped by our style. Without one—if our pages are indistinguishable from the pages of who-knows-how-many other scribblers—if Jackson Pollock's drips are no different from mine—if my leaps would satisfy Balanchine—if wines were as standardized as pop—if the grass is never greener on the other side—if our fingerprints, at least, our scars, our moles, our genes, don't distinguish us—then we

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are without an identity, without a trade, without a soul; for there will be no way for us to prove *we are we* when one *we* can do the work of another—another? what other?—because even a stop sign should say STOP in its own way, and at its own corner, if it wishes to be regarded as real, because the individual is everything, isn't it? and that's why the Wall had to come down, and why Mozart couldn't be Haydn, and why—if your sentences read like a cereal box or announcements on the sides of trucks—a chill should run hickory-dickory up and down your now anonymous spine, since sameness is death, and why it is vital to understand that Muller-Müller's lies were indisputably his, had his touch, and were undeniably deserving of praise.

She always packs too much, Muller-Müller shouldn't have thought (taking the bags one by one from the sullen cabby, sullen not because of an insufficient tip, Muller-Müller didn't suppose, but because the driver dimly knew he had been talked about, heard himself slandered in that American soldier-boy tongue, the shadow of the sense showing, even if he couldn't see its substance); no, Heinrich can't have M and M (as he was surreptitiously called) think his sweet wife carted too many clothes about because to think so would have committed another cliché, supported one more stereotype, and made his prose predictable; nor would he have made such a commonplace complaint if he were writing her up fairly, because she packed with rare wisdom for a wife, and never brought winter clothes on safari or bought heavy things you had to haul home in sacks whose strength was every moment waning, and lug aboard the plane like a bum and his bag lady . . . embarrassing . . . well . . . he could see their reflections as he turned, valise under his left arm, garment bag hung around his neck and slung over his right shoulder by a strap, the small case swinging from his left fist so it whacked his knee when he walked, the large bag scudding along the cement (lending the illusion of precision to the prose) . . . wait—*hung* and *slung* won't do, and *brought* and *bought* is suspicious . . . where is the wife? she's into the airport clickety-split, are any of these damn

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doors—whadyacallit?—seeing-eye, as if they had dogs by their sides barking once for open, twice for shut . . . yup, there's the wife, she's yattering with the press already; she pretends to hate the Filth Estate (as she calls them), says she despises journalists and loathes interrogations, when actually she eats them up . . . eats them up, when she wouldn't eat what she called "those calorie-coated German cutlets," we were everywhere hospitably offered, making a lunch out of nothing but beets once, their juice like a ring of blood around her mouth . . .

Indeed, it was a dreadful mistake making-up a name like Muller-Müller even if it sounded everso genuine, and even if the explanation of the hyphen, too, had the smell of the true-blue to it: my mother, Sophie Muller, Muller-Müller would, with a sober smile, explain, married Hans Müller, hence the umlaut over Heinrich's old man's *u* like a tiara, and the absence of one in his mother's *nom de née*; but nobody bought that story, except for *Stimme,* the German magazine, who apparently will print anything, especially if you allow them to pay exorbitantly for it. Muller-Müller prepares himself once again to tell the Press, who now are buzzing about like a bunch of ponces wanting to sell him a good time on their *Rieperbahn*, that he was really Fred Miller from Arkansas, and that he gave himself the name they knew him by (and sold his story to *Stimme* for an entire opera, man, not for a single song), in order to find out how it would feel to write under political oppression and public opprobrium, because he'd heard that such restrictions were great spurs to the imagination, that you had to suffer to create, and that once people believed he'd lived in Potsdam most of his life (though he did consider residing in Dresden), and was a Stasi spy from the age of five, when he turned his mother in for cooking cabbage according to a capitalist recipe; then, richly disgraced, he would compose, first, a reply, then a defense, finally an admission—each in inspired prose, and for an equivalent profit. In short, the works of Guilt would be followed by the works of Remorse, but these could be surpassed later by those

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which celebrated his rediscovery of God and the church, whether Catholic or Lutheran he hadn't decided yet. But there was no need to get ahead of history, and Muller-Müller was happy to leave unchosen his future faith.

#40. A proper name is extremely important in a novel—crucial. It is no more possible to give a character a new name than a new skin; it's like wanting to turn a Negro white.

However, though the wily Heinrich had been tripped up and exposed before he had got fairly started down the road of his ruse, things did seem to work out for the best, because Heinrich Zeitung Muller-Müller became famous as a fraud of an especially intriguing kind: as a non-German who had climbed the Wall from West to East to take up residence in a country covered by thick clouds even on a clear day, rather than being merely another native-born police spy in a left-wing Nazi State where there would have been more spies than victims spied upon if most of the spies hadn't been spying on other spies, which is always a necessity, since once one decides to be a spy, I don't care if it's for God, you have sold your soul simply to fill a file, and will consequently make mischief for the rest of your life as if it were your profession.

Fortunately Fred Miller was only a liar and a cheat, a con artist with inadequate skills, and aims quite beyond his reach, so he could be viewed with amused sympathy, and even with some surprise, because (though he had finally been forced to admit that he wasn't German, hadn't climbed the Wall from West to East, hadn't lived in Potsdam or considered residing in Dresden either, had spied on no one, turned up no secret traitors to the State, couldn't even speak the language, having had his Ozark-smoked American prose put into not-very-convincing Plattdeutsch by an old school chum, Trevor-Groper, who himself was no bargain, a klutz in fact, who wrote German with an English accent because he thought it lent his fibs about being a Rhodes Scholar and an Oxford don a whiff, like mint, of verisimilitude) . . . yes, because (as I had begun to say before I interrupted myself) Muller-Müller had expressed the East German's initial idealism, and told a

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sympathetic story of progressive involvement, disillusionment and betrayal, so convincingly, he became a hometown hit, representing brilliantly the pain of confronting the truth at last, and then writing (as he alleged) those daring subversive works which circulated only in manuscript (since, even if they were merely imaginary manuscripts, their readership was real enough): the story of the peasant who builds a hutch for his rabbits, for instance, a story so plainly put, so simply arranged, but told nevertheless in such an Aesopian way the reader understands the hutch to be society itself and each little round rabbit-dropping a bureaucrat; each of his brave tales passing from furtive hand to furtive hand, causing the anger of the populace to rise like yeast; and then, in the last act, with the authorities in furious though futile pursuit, the author bravely escaping to the West disguised as a steamer trunk. It was a saga to be cherished, and, as always, the truth had nothing to do with it.

#1. By now I have come to look on the world as a spectacle, and to laugh at it. What is the world to me? I shall ask little of it, I'll let myself float on the current of my heart and my imagination, and if anyone shouts too loudly perhaps I shall turn like Phocion, and say, "What is that cawing of crows?" Indeed, one thing which M and M discovered when he encouraged his imagination to go over the Wall to the East and take up residence in the mind and heart, not to say belly and loins, of a German writer, was the dread which he knew the feeling of his new importance should engender in him. As hard as he tried, and as many words as he wasted endeavoring to create the condition, he never really felt threatened by his imaginary manuscripts. He could put himself in the place of someone who watched his words in the workplace, lest he get reported to his superiors (that was like avoiding boy/girl jokes in the U.S.A.), or he could identify with someone who kept his political nose clean in order to keep his job and avoid contretemps (if you were gay in the U.S.A., you remained in the closet, because society would now pretend to tolerate fairies, if, like fairies, they were mostly invisible and very quiet and

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not inclined to flutter); but that a line of verse or a little scene in a small hotel (where Lily reveals the secrets of left-wing sex to Karl by making him a present of her manifestos) might excite any body's political libido, was a fact his inner self could not believe in.

It was true that, in the States, if you wrote about kikes and niggers, or your characters beat up women, you would get a lot of flack, and maybe face a lawsuit—nowadays only fat white balding old boy prots with a classical education are fair game—but a little legal wrangling over a case you might just win was scarcely the same as a life and a livelihood which might be suddenly snuffed; nor would your friends fall under suspicion if you spoke your mind, as if you'd been corrupted by them, and although your wife might not be kept on at the daycare center, she wouldn't just disappear one day in a puff of police.

If being offensive to folks was the only way to get attention back home (being offensive had become almost a moral obligation), and being inoffensive was the surest way to stay out of the State's sight in the East, neither was strictly speaking connected to writing well. *#3. An artist who is truly an artist, who works for himself alone, unconcerned with all else—that would be a wonderful thing; such an artist would perhaps know immense joy*. You can help your neighbor mow her lawn but can you really help your fellow man? No one, however strong, can do that alone, which is why we join parties and form groups and enlist aid and support some cause. Nor are such things always futile. I know of a few old buildings which have been saved that way, of improvements made to parks, and a few restrictive laws changed. But the truth is destroyed when you organize it, as are good intentions, too. A writer should be wary of the world, as if it were a place of poisonous ivies and venomous snakes.

The problem with repression and threats to one's life, like the cowardly and self-serving *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, dependent as they all are on the devoted ignorance and murderous compliance of the masses, was the persistent distraction

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which distressed the soul, the obsessive thought of fear and revenge which possessed the mind, especially for those to whom politics had always been important, and religion, too, so that they were already weakened by the need for belief, with the consequence that to sit down to write was to sit down to brood, to mull over, ruminate, only to throw up, like a cat, the grass just chewed.

#30. In our day I believe that a thinker (and what is an artist if not a triple thinker?) should have neither religion, country, nor even any social conviction. Absolute doubt now seems to me so completely substantiated that it would be almost silly to seek to formulate it.

Muller-Müller's wife—what was he calling her today? Louise?—was now really miffed because the little crowd of cameras she had so winsomely approached were merely waiting to make a raincoat commercial. Herr Muller-Müller was no longer news, nor was Fred Miller either. He was being kicked, but not escorted, out. He would not have to recite his intentions again. And at the airline counter there was a long sloppy line of sad, disgruntled, or impatient faces. He found the queue's frazzled terminus and let down his bags between spots of umbrella water. Louise lurked a little way off, perhaps signifying her disdain for the loser, alas, she felt she was linked by loops of stale leftover love to, or maybe she was just dismayed by the line, or still annoyed by their total fall from fame, and the embarrassment of her mistake. "Loops of stale leftover love?" Geez. "Why don't you change our marks back into money," he semi-shouted at her, pointing to an icon which directed tourists to a Currency Counter. "Our dough doesn't rise, now you want me to punch it down, nevertheless," Louise said, snatching his billfold from his proffered hand. "That's all you've got left? I've most of my money in my purse where it will stay." "Hey, I always pay for everything," Fred said, "I'm still playing the captain of this houseboat." Louise's look said she was totally tired of his whiny badinage. She had once characterized his usual frame of mind as one of "smug self-pity," but he had rejected this description, calling it a psycho-

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logical contradiction. Actually, it was peculiar to be pestered by a person who was so completely in your power that you could alter her breast size with a word. *Small* would do.

Lines made Miller gloomy. He always ruminated while standing in them, staring into the space he hoped to reach, counting the backs ahead of him without really noticing what he was doing. At first it was the petty patter of his wife, then it was the failure of the press to hound him, maybe the rain, and now this line of lumpen luggage bearers, which had lowered his nose to the level of his socks. There he saw a pair of bright yellow pumps with high heels, a sturdy walking sandal whose wool sock oozed between its thongs like molecular pudding, a badly bitten bluish ankle, and lots of little wheels on which trunks trundled, or larger ones, their rims wrapped with rubber, which racked bags, and robbed porters of their livelihood. *#4. To be stupid and selfish and to have good health are the three requirements for happiness, though if stupidity is lacking, the others are useless.*

Louise was at the Airport Bank exchanging one kind of money for another, which wasn't what he wanted to call creativity. Nor was it creative to jimmy a pfennig or two from the transaction. Fred felt about bankers the way everybody who wasn't a banker felt about bankers. You were only creative if you added new life to life. Otherwise, you might be inventive. But by "new life," Fred didn't mean new like the two tikes who troubled his sight, both military brats, their mother a Gretchen, their father a Yank in mufti, or the babe in arms up the line he would certainly be seated by, and expected to coo at, too, as if kids were some sort of blessing instead of one of the world's many plagues. No, by "new" he didn't mean additional. More people meant more pain, more strife. Nowadays, you had to earn the right to nibble at the celery. And Fred Miller wanted desperately to prove he deserved to be, as if existence were a prize handed out in advance of the deed. However his desperation frequently led him to do things like lie, commit fraud, write slop, look for an angle, call himself Muller-Müller, cultivate critics, bad-mouth the competi-

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tion which denied him his just desserts, which yielded him at best but external goods: a few bucks, a bit of glory, a moment of renown, a session in the sack with some young climber who took him for a sturdy rung on the ladder of literature—and left him feeling guilty and a failure, because, of course, that's what he was. He was another lout in this unmoving line.

The only encouraging thing was that people were piling up behind him now; but what sort of encouragement was that? to be scum, not dregs, to be a pissy writer, not a shitty one? Everybody had a manner. He could see that by examining the fellow sufferers standing stupidly ahead of him, beginning to become impatient, some more immediately than others, some voices raised, some higher, some thinner, a few rapid with complaint, others chatty, apparently oblivious to their circumstances, engrossed in their narrations: the purchase of a piece of the Wall, their reasons for returning to the States, the way the kids had behaved on the trip, their comfortable shoes, the wretched weather, the cost of everything. There was nothing unusual in all this. He had heard these voices, logged their messages, and observed such lines, over and over again. "Marie! Stay close to mommy, honey." He and Louise were no exceptions, typical tourists, entering this tired sentence like two worn out words.

How often had he remarked the short skirt stretched to the point of pain across an immense haunch, only in this instance it wasn't pink, it was robin's egg, the pink was farther along toward the head of the line, on a scarf; and the man with the mustache he tended like a garden was present again, but this time the fuzz was on a fuller face. How could he miss the kid with the half-head of bald hair who was everywhere, even in his dreams, as was the aluminum rack on the back of that young girl, fresh faced as a cola ad, her bedroll as predictable as the pace of the line which was now inching forward so that he had to shove his baggage ahead with his shoe. A habit of his. Miller began to undress her, starting with the pack. He would pitch the pup tent, unroll the roll, before undoing her

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shirt. Immediately in front of him were two young men—college students—as trim as lean meat, in German sweaters straight from a shop in Prague, judging by the knit, and worn over Havel Ts, which helped him make the inference, because when the silent one suddenly pulled his sweater off over his head there the T-shirt was. The crowd was warming up the hall. Here, dear, let me unhook you, he tried to pretend. Down on the soft Black Forest floor. Louise handed him some money in familiar denominations. Twenties. Tens. O to be twenty again, hiking in the mountains with a merry maid, trying to find a way to make out in a hostel, putting calamine on bee bites, suffering through the inevitable irregularity of meals, hitchhiking for hours on a hot highway, house on one's back like a mortgage, stolen apple hiding in your pocket, the bite you'd try before flinging the fruit from you, green and bitter as grass. The train of time tooted and his toe pushed his history ahead. "Train of time?" Geez.

A sentence, he said to himself. I am sentenced. And all of us are simply clots of words, groups we've formed and will form again, wandering, waiting, wallflowered, some like old folks out of relatives and friends, words entering and exiting rooms, walking halls, strolling in gardens, through neighborhoods, milling about with other words, forming lines, disappearing into books. Look here, an unfamiliar one has now appeared alongside my two students, eastern seaboard by the speech of them, but not the new fellow, greasy as a spoon, twelve kinky clumps of hair tousling his big fat head. It seems that they know one another. Small talk. Shove ahead. The line has moved. Louise has said. What has she said? Louise is "Louise," but only I can see the quotes which skip her up a grade from person to proper name, and elevate her Being. Standing by me, coupled, Fred *and* Louise. In the lineup. The boys before me too, in syntactical talk, shaped like a short phrase which qualifies our collection of bags and worries, the heaviness of our columnar bodies, yes, they comprise a clause; and then, stretching to the counter where a young pale lady leans to listen to language she cannot understand, to a question

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she will answer anyway, *that*—her narrow pale face with its fiery lips—is the head of the sentence we are all standing in, each term of us moving toward her features, her red mouth, to modify a meaning no one in the line will know. Before long, all of us will be rearranged in other collections, connected by diversified spaces, making meanings of a mundane kind, no doubt, only to drift again in a northerly direction (where was *northerly's* last port of call?); each of us minutely altered by our interaction, our exchanges, so that over time our significance will almost insensibly shift, until *hip* (of which Louise is properly proud) (or that haunch over which a pale blue skirt is stretched) will add the meaning of *savvy* to its substance, misspelling *hep,* and understood these days to mean "with it," thus permitting us to say: "Boy, Rosey, you sure are hip." That's another expression foreign to Henry James.

For the real writer life resembles language, coughs up language like gobs of bloody spit, suggests words, each of which is deep beyond diving, wide beyond reach. Lovemaking used to be thoughtless (remember how love was?); limb rubbed limb without a line between them; the inarticulate cry was the body's talk; but as our senses dulled to one another, the familiar was forgotten, and words rose in the mind where reality had been, reminders to touch this nip, that flat stretch of skin, to moan as if out of one's head, until sex became manipulation and performance; well, words everywhere interprose themselves between our jam-spread toast and our closing teeth, our footfalls and the walk they fall on, our clothes of wool and silk and an equally swaddled world. What justifies Fred's wait in his airline line? for who has shown up to enliven his tedium but the sweaty fat guy with a cartload of clothes who has parked alongside his friends now, all of them chatting like birds; yes, he's playing the friendship card, but planning to break the queue—that's what the shit is up to—he intends to slip into the line far ahead of his turn—too late to plug the asshole which gave the turd birth—furthermore, the inference of fat boy's machinations has angered Fred who is already annoyed by wife and life and lies and loss of

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attention, as well as the slow line itself, inefficiency's consequence, looping behind him as he turns to look and measure the extent of fat kink's crime: what justifies any of this but its description?

If a swallow of wine is exploring my mouth like a darting tongue, I do not say "a kiss, yes, of the French kind, quite wet really, and frantic, pushy, who is it trying to kid?" I do not even mutter the wine's fine name or label its kind or murmur the sacred year of its birth, not in that Dionysian mood in which I and my wine are one; however, no one merely waiting for a line to move is in such a frameless frame of mind, although the two Americans and their greaseball Iranian queue-crasher are pretending to be oblivious to everything but their happy chit-chat; nevertheless, chit-chat or chat-chit, Fred knows that Fatratfuck is figuring out when to edge his cart . . . ah, now, there it goes, a foot forward and at an insidious angle into the queue like a fender-dent, and to Fred it is the spear which pierced his so-called savior's side.

#14. Let us love the muse and love her and love her. The child that may be born is of minor importance: the purest pleasure is in the kissing.

Louise said. What did Louise say? Nod. Smile in her direction. But her face is turned away. Fred and Louise still conjoined by the ubiquitous conjunction. They rode inside of several sentences through the rain to the railroad station and now they are waiting in this aforementioned line to purchase a seat in a first-class carriage. Off to Lyon to eat snails. Haven't lied to anyone at all. Are twenty-five and thirty, fit as fiddles, in constant touch, a look here, a sniff there, a bit of pressure on the arm, a brush of bum, murmur of endearment, an odor of sexual satisfaction rising from them like a smug fog. No. Fog settles. It's mist that rises. Fuck it. Also not in James, who ducked it. Nor did he rhyme.

Fred is debating with himself. He is basically a patsy, easily pushed hither, even more readily pushed yon. He hates scenes, that's why he is somewhat surprised by his reaction to the East Germans' accusations: he was pleased with himself, talked

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back in a confident even arrogant way, enjoyed their annoyment . . . no, annoyance . . . the magazine's discomfiture too, because they'd been taken in, conned, fooled by a fellow from—where is Fred from, Kansas? Iowa? Iowa City, sure, every writer in America is from Iowa City, where poetry looks the same as prose but sounds sleepier, the way, among states, Iowa is supposed to be. He had them buffaloed, which means, more likely, Wyoming or Colorado. Some cowboy place. In America everybody wants to know, first off, where you're from, as if it mattered, when it clearly doesn't, as in this case. Louise is from Florida. Fred is from California. Two states which have no natives. Only immigrant trash from New York and North Dakota.

Anyway, Fred is debating with himself. Should he do more than glare at the Fatsweat Ratfuck? He was doing that now. And Fatsweat Kinkhead Ratfuck is giving him the corner of his right eye. Uneasy, shifty, symbolically shouldering Fred aside, but clipping Fred's furious glances to paste in his scrapbook. Certainly, Fred's glare is collectable; it is a glare which would melt fat. And certainly, Ratfuck is moist as a Greasy Spoon's dish towel. His shirt (what difference does it make if it's blue?) has fled the wide embrace of his belt and has bloomered a bit. Or should Fred suddenly shout at the fellow, pop the question: are you trying to break this queue, young man? Is that ratsweat I perceive on your swarthy ethnical brow? you Allah-worshipping author-threatener. Or should he simply point with a stern finger to the rear of the line, now full of Hong Kong Chinese, or some other sort of rich refugee. Hey, see the other immigrants back there—that's where you belong—end of the line.

The thought that Ratfuck's attempt to inveigle himself and his rack of rags into the line—a line which begins with a pale faced female functionary who has highly visible reddened red lips, and ends with a clutter of Gucci-baggaged Chinese money launderers—is symbolic of some international condition: that unpleasant thought will occur to Mr. Miller much later. In, as we say, retrospect. When he is Mr. Miller once again.

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#21. The entire value of my book, if it has any, will consist of my having known how to walk straight ahead on a hair, balanced above the two abysses of lyricism and vulgarity (which I seek to fuse in analytical narrative). When I think of what it can be I am dazzled.

Standing there, sore-footed from a week of gawking about and running from the police, Fred is falling further and further into the dumps. He doesn't denounce the interloper, who is still chatting away with his pretend friends while eyeing Fred warily, sliding his cart into the queue as it makes its way briskly forward now, since other uniformed and lipsticked ladies have arrived, and, yes, now there is a middle-aged, rust-thatched, bark-skinned man with a clipboard made of Masonite moving back along the line (shall I say, querying people in the queue?), asking – what a splendid bustline! – a woman, whose splendid bustline had been hidden from Fred's scrutiny before, whether she has packed her bags herself or had her Palestinian maid do it, and whether she owns a hairdryer (she does) or any other object shaped like a .45 (she doesn't), but her hairdryer isn't in her luggage, she says, see, I've got it in my capacious purse, she says, pulling the drier out and pointing it at the clipboard carrying chap, who is taken aback, whereupon three members of the Security Forces who have been lurking behind some arras or other rush forward, Uzies at the ready . . . Uzies blazing, shooting the clipboard from the functionary's fingers . . .

Nah. Cut that. Return to the line about the bust. Of course, men no longer see women in that crass way, having been threatened with Incorrectness by the Thought Police. Fred, something of a Neanderthal still, has been trying to improve his character, and only the other day (the bed they were bouncing on was just off the Fasanenstraße in a ritzy district) said to Louise, "I am not fucking you, dear, because I admire and desire your body, I am fucking you because I admire your mind, and the erotically efficient way you do your job."

Nah. Cut that. Stick to the subject. Which is? the Creative Imagination of the Artist. *Grundlagen* of. Which is? the

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medium is the only muse. Everything else that's been conjectured about "creativity" is balderdeutsch. The next theorist to suggest a separation between form and content, meaning and expression, plan and execution, style and idea, should be required to recite the place names of Hawaii until his mental health improves.

#10. For my part, until someone comes along and separates for me the form and the substance of a given sentence, I shall continue to maintain that those two terms are meaningless. Every beautiful thought has a beautiful form, and vice versa. In the world of Art, form exudes Beauty; just as in our world it exudes temptation and love. Of course the Master means to refer to well-shaped sentences, not to the noxious pages which Fred's rivals wipe across their cracks and hope will count as writing. The symmetry of the lady is astounding, Fred thinks, examining her as if she were a paragraph. She is also interestingly irregular in the right way, for there's a wry twist to her full lips, a slight lean to a weaker left leg, an ear which has been allowed to escape her hair where it's been swept like a surfer's wave to one side. *Just as you cannot remove from a physical body the qualities that constitute it—color, extension, solidity—without reducing it to a hollow abstraction, without destroying it, so you cannot remove the form from the Idea, because the Idea exists only by virtue of its form. Imagine an idea that has no form—such a thing is impossible, just as a form that does not express an idea. Such concepts are stupidities on which literary criticism feeds.*

Hair/where—hair/where—there's always something. No one in this line, which has so far had to stand for the ineptness of our airlines, the docility of the populace, the mixture of peoples, the profit in tourist and travel trappings, the present pecking order in advanced societies, the moral degeneracy of some races, the ineradicable salaciousness of the male eye, and the nature of sentential functions. Fred's gaze wanders from woman to woman, young to old. Wonder of wonders: they all had form. Louise, he was sure, did not put a check beside every male she saw: yes, no, maybe, or, good, better,

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best, as in his case. Fred had never eaten an ear of corn he didn't like. Now we know he's from Iowa.

It's born in you, Fred felt, this passion for form. *#5. What I love above all else, is form, provided it be beautiful, and nothing else beyond it.* This sad string of souls, for instance, inching toward nothing more than check-in, just as, even more unperceptively, each member of it is slipping away toward check-out too (like a snake, the queue keeps swallowing more significance), this line possesses a low-level of organization, a bit better than a pile, which is held together by the similarity of its occupants and their common location: heap of stones, heap of potatoes, heap a' livin; because there is also, in every one of its elements, a shared aim—to receive the A-OK of Miss Red Lips, and get let into the flight lounge.

Get/let—get/let—gauntlet—there's always something. Fred's head would keep after the image trying to see what shapes it would take, stretching, compressing, twisting it about, but by the time it reached print the metaphor which made this line a line of language would be a single line itself, as fixed as a frieze, without revisions or alternatives, tryouts or mistakes. There are no erasures in ordinary life, every incomplete gesture, every fit and start, every ass you've made of yourself, has its moment, has its embarrassment, has its disappearance too; although there may be more than one record of you making a fool of yourself; yes, there may be many accounts, and each of these will differ: some will seem more complete, a few more eloquent, one or two more damning, your favorite version amusing and low-key. And there will no doubt be half a dozen downright lies.

#16. When, in a big way or a small one, one wishes to meddle with God's works, one must begin—if only from the hygienic point of view—by putting one's self in such a position that one cannot be made a fool of. A dunce among these dumbos, if I were merely passing by, a new arrival maybe, on my way downtown, then perhaps I could call this queue by its right name. *You can depict wine, love, women, and great exploits on the condition that you are not a drunkard,*

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a lover, a husband, or a hero. If you are involved in life, you see it badly; your sight is affected either by suffering or by enjoyment. The artist, in my way of thinking, is a monstrosity, something outside nature. O to be an artist. O to be outside Nature. Where I could render Rat Fuck as the Rat Fuck he really is.

What? Hair as rubber-red as a pencil eraser's. Yes, that's why we've been standing for a period approaching forever in this line, Louise replies. What? His speech seems as thin as he is; it emerges like a soft whistle, mostly made of air. I packed all of these bags personally, every piece, Louise answers, pretending to read her Exchange receipt. What? Fred can't make him out, but Louise always answers, even if tartly. Most sentences are like this line where words have come together willy-nilly, only a few have known one another before (Fred and Louise, that conjunction again, the family groups, a few friends, Rat Fuck and his pretend pals) (have you asked *him* your questions, Fred says, nodding at Rat Fuck's fat back) (he's a queue breaker, Fred wants to say, and queue breakers murder their mothers and blow up planes); a sentence made of strangers, then, held together here during these few disagreeable moments like an utterance, like an expletive (hardly creative: fuck you, Rat Fuck, you fucker!), and then to part to become a passenger list, a weary bunch waiting for their luggage, followed by dispersal, scarcely a good-bye, never to come together again, and everyone grateful for it; although similar sentences will be formed day after day in airports all over the world, and many of these poor words will find themselves in similar sorry sentences countless times in a shabby queue-cursed life.

The voice of the clipboard carrier, coming from behind Fred now, was more understandable overheard than heard. He was asking people to fill out a few forms, help the airline do a better job; he hoped to enroll them in a frequent-flier plan, lure them from one line into another. He wasn't the Security Interrogator after all. What had Louise been saying to this guy, then? As a matter of fact, Louise had been speaking for

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some time of a skirt she had seen in a chic shop window (chic shop, chic shop, chic shop, the line was advancing in earnest now), and she was wishing she had given in to her impulse to buy it . . . no, more stereotyping, trash it . . . even if that was what she was saying. Write instead that Louise was speaking animatedly about Mandelbrot's chaos theory, and pointing out how its calculations would apply to their queue, including its waver, its length, the timing of its spasmodic movements, the chances of it being augmented anywhere along its length by a brazen, insensitive, and selfish interloper named Rat Fuck the First.

The trouble with the line was exactly its fragility, its slender hold on existence, its inherent evanescence, even if it gave the impression of being eternal. It was too loosely formed. Even when its members were all seated uncomfortably in the airplane's cabin, their arrangement (though some had chosen aisle when asked, and others had pleaded to be put in the last three rows near the johns where smoking was permitted, and where the stewardesses sat to chat), their configuration was fundamentally random, even though the syntax of the cabin was stingy and rigid, every proper name belted in place. More of that anon. The aim of art, and something which could not be imagined in advance, was a line so perfectly interconnected it generated its own personality; a line so fulfilling of every term none of its elements would want to leave; a line one would defend against any change, a place where Fred and Louise would be frozen forever, as if they were carved on Keats's Urn, and finally at peace too, however grave-like and stony, because Fred's otherwise overly loud clan-plaid shirt rhymed with the tan tam on the kid with the bad limp the kid had probably had from birth. Yes, weren't those corrective tennis shoes?

#25. What a bitch of a thing prose is! It is never finished; there is always something to be done over. Still, I think it is possible to give it the consistency of verse. A good prose sentence should be like a good line of poetry—unchangeable, just as rhythmic, just as sonorous.

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Fred Miller began his career as a novelist by memorizing *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert,* however this feat, which measured his fanaticism, and spoke well of his work habits, did not significantly involve his writing skill, which, according to some of his critics, left everything to be desired. Fred remembered an appropriate quotation, *#29,* commencing, *Nothing great is ever done without fanaticism* . . . but now the line had reached its delta and tended to flow out of control. There were two podia (was that the plural?) in front of them, manned by a pair of hostess-haired young women trying to be twins, and at this point the line frayed, Rat Fuck pushed his cart around the couple in front of him and rushed the left-hand lady, eager to be questioned about his bag-packing habits, and if he took gifts without examining the state of their teeth. *#22* came to Miller's maddened mind: *I am leading a stern existence, stripped of all external pleasure, and am sustained only by a kind of permanent rage. . . .*

Louise was repeating her litany about yes, she had, and, no, she hadn't. Red mouth was well in sight now, like the promised land, peering at passports with a smile so complete it parted all her lips. Soon they would be checked in and could wait sitting down instead of standing up. Soon they would have their bored bodies tickled by invisible rays, and soon a boarding announcement would be made. Fred wondered whether he should then pretend to be blind or lame so as to get let on early—*get/let get/let*—no, that's Rat Fuck's ploy, he thought, so Fred said to Louise, I'll bet Rat Fuck pulls the halt/lame dodge to beat us on, and Louise said, naw, he wouldn't do that, that's a bet I'll take, what are your odds? and started to go on and on about it until Fred wished he'd never mentioned the matter, or even imagined it; still, it was a reasonable question: what would Rat Fuck do when the kids and their decrepit grandmothers were given preference? but that remained, like so much else, to be continued. . . .

II

Why do I always have to sit in the center seat, Louise wondered. Fred knows women have smaller bladders. I'll have to

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crawl over him while he's asleep or make him stand up while he's having a drink, and that'll annoy him—what doesn't?—now all he has on his mind is that guy who weaseled his way into the line ahead of us. It's our bad luck the sweaty squit had to sit near us where Fred can death-ray his rear, really the back of his neck, I guess. Men. So he should have told him off when he broke the queue if it was so important. First he'll stew about it for a while—*queue/stew queue/stew*—and I'll have to endure his ill humor, and then he'll plan to put the creep into a book, into some story or other. I always thought that was the way you immortalized somebody—put them into a book—but it turns out that's what you do to get even. I don't dare divorce him. He'll make public our lack of private life and I'll be a laughing stock. He's probably done it to me a dozen times. It's a good thing I don't read what he writes. It's a good thing nobody does. What's so important about writing? Actually, it gets in the way of everything. I'd rather listen to the singing strings.

Center/aisle, center/aisle, Fred thought, why does she insist on center/aisle when we could have the center/window instead. I prefer the window. Since I was a kid. I love to see camels cavorting in the sky disguised as cumulous clouds. And the creatures there below, lost on their farms, in the Alpine snow, among a junkyard of tarry roofs, are now the dots they deserve to be. When I was a kid it took balls to take a plane. Girls closed their eyes when the plane took off, women held their husband's hand when the plane landed. Sexy drops of sweat beaded their upper lip. You could kiss one by one the drops off. Cause comfort to come over them. Reassurance. Yeah, I'm here dear and the world is still round; hon, if it's square, I'll curve its corners. Didn't I get us safely down? Better than piloting the plane myself. But what are we good for now? killing spiders and bearing their splayed legs away in a bit of paper napkin. If I were at the window, she wouldn't have to crawl over me when she needs to pee. She wouldn't have to crawl over me when she needs to pee. She wouldn't have to crawl over me when she needs to pee.

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I couldn't tell him off. The squit. That's the male's prerogative. Well, you can argue it's not the male prerogative anymore, but you have to persuade the masculine psyche to take a hike first. Fred would have been embarrassed. He hates scenes. And he hates me making the play. He probably wishes we women would still whimper when the plane takes off and clutch the male's strong palm when it's set down. Hell, our testicles were always big and round. They were just undescended. But our bladders are no bigger than walnuts. Fred even hated my talking about the taxi driver that way, even though he knew the fumacious inconsiderate jerk didn't understand a word. My god, I think Fred's asleep all ready. Lift off and he's off. Shit. And I need to pee.

As Fred begins to doze he holds the Rat Fuck's fat neck in his sights. If I were the victim of a disease or had suffered the right sort of psychic wound maybe my work would be better, and I wouldn't spend so much of my time hating the world and my life, strapped into Procrustean seats like these; a symbolic setting surely, from the squeeze of the armrests to the tray I have to eat from, little squiffs of stale air periodically puffed in my face through a nozzle I can scarcely reach and never properly adjust. What's she saying the movie is? the who? the what? *The Mighty Ducks*? Sure, one might write a little happy lyric about—O someone, who? what?—kingfishers catching fire, yes, Hopkins is pure pleasure, when elsewhere on earth than in lines like his are such riches offered to the ear? and that's where inspiration comes from: the deliriously great way it has sometimes been done, word attracting word as, what does he say? dragonflies draw flame, you bet, as . . . as tumbled over rim in roundy wells . . . ah . . . stones . . . O do they! . . . O stow . . . O stones ring. *As* and *like* and *is*—as each earthladen thing finds tongue to fling out broad its name, like Rat Fuck flung his singulating self into the queue, cart first, heavy with his belongings, and one knew then, watching his layered self-indulgent self shove himself ahead of Fairness and Patience and Boredom's Dulled Pain to put himself, without a flag which proclaimed him standard-bearer, in—not

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even the van, where he might come under fire—but in the soft undefended middle where the gate to the line was being guarded by a wimp. Ah, a wimp, yes; but a wimp, don't I wish? of God.

Fred used to fall off her like that, and go to sleep as his cliché said he should, and having shot his wad simply wait the arrival of the reload like a rifle leaning again a wall, well, a nice trick, Louise thought, envying his ease, and in fact she used to eye him with a little, soft-as-lotion love, in his baby snooze, back in the beginning of their nighttime days, thankful he'd finished before her own nerves had begun to tingle, so she could enjoy sliding downward to darkness, wasn't it? on this plane's extended wings.

In the dark, desire sees best of all. Sure. Hopkins might listen when things called out their true names to him, rang and rattled and sang their song, each dealing—how does it go?—each mortal thing does one thing and the same—what? no—the next line was too compacted for memory, too twisted to repeat. The point was that each creature, every object, turned its interior out like an emptied pocket: when the tree leafed, flower bloomed, dog barked, bee buzzed, cicada screamed, bell rang—there their *Dasein*, in its entirety, was. Well, Fred dimly thought, okay, once in a while the poet might write to praise the world—*ruhmen, daß ist*—but most of the time even Hopkins was singing a doleful tune. The jay calls "caw" and all is quiet. Why? Because the crow is about. Hoping to kill the fledglings. No worse, there is none. That's the central string of the muse's lyre. Pitched past pitch of grief: that's where the poet's soul is thrown. The comic capitalizes on flaws, and is laughing always at somebody's expense; the tragic needs no definition here, it's invariably about how unrelievedly bad things will turn out to be, no matter how wonderful they momentarily seem; the epic ends in triumph, but only after trials so severe it's clear the struggle wasn't worth it. Yes, we complain of life that it grieves us. We complain again when it leaves us. Fred heard his own recitation faintly since his ears were as shut as his eyes, closed against the neck

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which he would otherwise have seen prop up the head across the aisle in front of him, slowly turning red from shame, he dreams, burning until the collar begins to smoke, a low blue curl appearing first, then a gray cloud, finally a brown billow bursting into a roil of intense black gunk as though a pile of tires were burning, one metaphor making another, how else did the garden grow? from *as* and *like* to *is*.

The fact is, and Louise knew the facts, had a head for figures, called a spade a spade, even when it wasn't trumps, so Louise knew, confidently knew, that her fond spouse Fred wouldn't have been quite so put out by the breaking of the queue had it occurred behind him instead of immediately ahead, smack in his face, delaying *him,* even by a little, as if Fate knew Fred was just another Abject of Allah and would merely glare and inwardly fume, but accept the role he was given. These days, everything evil looked Middle East. That guy probably had a bomb in his bowel. His stupidly greedy kind could be counted on to buy fraudulently labeled bargains from the Duty-free Shop, and Louise had seen him looking through the plane's catalogue for color-coded crud before he'd had time to settle his fat behind into his squeeze-your-ass seat, though he was already surrounded by sealed duty-waived bags, their plastic handles stretched by a big bottle of scotch for Uncle Ahmad no doubt, and five pounds of chocolate-covered cherries for Aunt Anahita, a name she remembered from *The Satanic Verses* (may its copies multiply and lay-waste the earth), and who knew how many cartons of Marlboros for his friends who liked to drink and smoke during those inattentive times when Allah was visiting his concubines.

THE CAPTAIN HAS TURNED THE SEAT BELT SIGN ON. The announcement nudged Fred woozily awake. We are about to serve you one of our miserable meals, so we expect rough air; we expect you to tear futilely at the plastic mustard with which you would like to cover your slab of dry ham; we expect coffee to slosh out of your cup when we hit a cloud, and fake sugar to shoot from the packet with pain you have finally ripped in two; we expect mayonnaise to smear a page of that book

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you bought in Berlin and ooze like pus from the dry bread we brought all the way from the U.S.A. in order to avoid your having to eat anything either decent or foreign on this plane; because you're home now, ain't ya? on sacred airborne ground, and we expect every passenger to do hizzur duty, that is to say: sit. So Rat Fuck stands up to fetch something from the overhead, shirttail totally untucked (why is it untucked? because *untucked* rhymes with *fucked*), and with difficulty pulls down one of his large floral and cloth-covered valises—it looked like a large purse—plopping it on his seat where, after taking more pains to get it open, he begins to rummage. Fred had not missed the fact that Rat Fuck had carried on four bags, one in each hand and one under each arm, bumping awkwardly down the aisle, against the airline's rules, of course, and storing three above and one below his seat, heaving and squeezing while clogging the aisle so that other passengers were forced to wait behind him, he apparently oblivious to the gridlock he was causing, perspiring copiously, color suffusing his face, a kind of stubborn sulky determination composing his doughy features.

Louise felt Fred should do better by her, after all she was his wife, but once again he was devoting his language to another of his created creatures, most of them cartoons anyway, exaggerated to the point of parody; though she also had the wit to remember how many of his descriptions of her were of the same sort—mean and humiliating—poking fun at her rockabyebaby walk on account of the high heels she insisted on traveling in, or her forthright point of view on all things, which he always made both frank and simple-minded—he was such a misoge—only being nice when he wanted a feel up; because, although Fred was always quoting his Führer, Flaubert, on the true artist's godlike detachment, for instance: *#26. Art is not interested in the personality of the artist. So much the worse for him if he doesn't like red or green or yellow: all colors are beautiful, and his task is to use them* . . . , he was nevertheless nothing but what he wrote. It was

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odd. Fred was what he wrote because he wrote it, while she was what he wrote because she was what he wrote about. He did himself by doing; she was done by what was done. In short: he creates himself by creating me. So both of us are fictions, she thought. But I am the prior and more important one. That was a kind of comfort. Louise opened her magazine. My god, she thought, he's given me *Redbook* to read.

Fred felt fulfilled, felt real, only when facing the page, for in that space he seemed supreme. O there were difficulties galore, of course, the page was a pain; yet here, he would say to himself, here I am free, nagless, invincible to others, only my own limitations limit me, and all my endeavors are like isometric exercises, the angel I wrestle is myself, and my struggles make me stronger. Rat Fuck is fighting his luggage, he thinks, but it is really himself in those big bumbles of borrowed baggage, because what Middle Eastern man would choose to lug large roses—were they?—leaves as green as spinach, purple and pink petals on a scuffed black ground—what male mahout would disgrace his sex by showing himself to the world with luggage like that—as if in an old maid's company? But that, Fred began to believe, was the secret of Rat Fuck's invincibility. He had taught himself not to care for the world's opinion. He pursued his passions and satisfied himself without regard for the rights, views, values, of others. Just go get it. (Actually, it was exactly the right attitude for the writer.) He was like a submarine, mostly submerged. He probably broke only small laws: parked his car in handicapped spaces, didn't tip even decent service or return his grocery cart to its storage space, took more than his share of popcorn, pie or cake, hogged the limelight, whatever there was, farted like a punctured tire, hurled himself into crowded subway cars while thinking only, I want to go where I want to go, and I want to go now.

So when Flaubert famously said, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi," what he meant was, *Madame Bovary* made him into the master we admire, just as Sir Walter Scott became "the author of *Waverly,*" a writer we may not esteem as highly,

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although knighted by his queen and turned into what logicians call "a definite description." Instead of being modestly defined as a Frenchman, writer, bachelor, romancer, scoffer, misogynist (and who would say "merely" to any of these) (certainly he was never laird or lord), Flaubert became the author of . . . not detective stories, bodice rippers, porno pleasers, or costumed adventures churned out to pay the bills, like Scott, Dumas, or a dozen others did . . . but the author of *Madame Bovary,* the author of excellence, the author of *Bouvard et Pécuchet;* so that the man who, at the same time, remained a rather coarse hail-and-well-met fellow, insensitive and selfish, morose and cynical, was made by his night-by-night work, by his fanatical verbal fastidiousness, into a scrupulous perceiver of the world, since he had to choose his adjectives carefully, pick his prepositions like a chef selects fresh ingredients, sort his nouns like a jeweler choosing among common stones the true gems, and cut malignant growths from his prose as ruthlessly as a surgeon removes a discovered tumor; he had to fill himself with subtle and tender anticipations in order to wring every drop of significance from his fiction's dirty laundry; striving patiently to overcome his weaknesses, persevering when both world and writing seemed to oppose him, ready to redo everything or begin again, seeking a loveliness he could not divine ahead of time; until his hard soul was softened by his own prose, until he was sometimes so surprised by the skill he had acquired, so moved by the beauty of what he had written, that, as he says, in *#22, Sometimes, when I am empty, when words don't come, when I find I haven't written a single sentence after scribbling whole pages, I collapse on my couch and lie there dazed, bogged in a swamp of despair, hating myself and blaming myself for this demented pride which makes me pant after a chimera. A quarter of an hour later everything changes; my heart is pounding with joy. Last Wednesday I had to get up and fetch my handkerchief; tears were streaming down my face. I had been moved by my own writing; the emotion I had conceived, the phrase that rendered*

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it, and the satisfaction of having found the phrase—all were causing me to experience the most exquisite pleasure.

The emotion, its phrase, its finding, the pleasure: these are one thing, created and discovered in a single act of execution.

Writing makes the writer. We should not be surprised. A weight lifter does not earn his muscles by dreaming of them first and then pressing two hundred pounds. Nor does a chess player improve by imagining himself a champion, but only by playing one. So if a society were to want writers it would encourage reading of the right sort, the sort that would teach quality not quantity, innovation not convention, subtlety not glibness, contemplation not instruction, challenge not amusement, permanence not the nonce, reality not its representation. So if a society wished to inhibit the development of its writers, keeping youngsters out of the company of good books would be a splendid beginning.

Let them read instead trash which is locally treasured. Let them take pride in being Scots, or Samoans, and memorize epics in meters beaten by oars upon ocean waters. Let them grow up stupid, Fred thought, it cuts the competition.

Reading of the right sort realizes that writing, like culture in general, is a matter of making choices; it is a matter of discrimination and selection; it must be free of any ideological interference; and it must cast upon the page a passionately formal eye, for that is where the art lies. Quality depends upon the realization, within a chosen medium, of the right relations, and upon the understanding and acceptance of the consequences of such connections. For instance, George Herbert's famous poem, "The Pearl," is concerned with preferment, and why the poet is prepared to love God and seek Heaven rather than lead an alternative life—one of learning or honor, or of pleasure. Chairman Flaubert would say, that since there is no such pearly place, we'll have to imagine the poem is about art, always our leader's ultimate goal and supreme endeavor. But that kind of correctness scarcely matters. Having described and rejected the other paths, Herbert concludes:

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I know all these and have them in my hand:
Therefore not seelëd, but with open eyes
I flie to thee, and fully understand
Both the main sale, and the commodities;
And at what rate and price I have thy love;
With all the circumstances that may move.
Yet through these labyrinths, not my groveling wit,
But thy silk twist let down from heav'n to me,
Did both conduct and teach me, how by it
To climbe to thee.

As God embodied Himself in Jesus to descend, we must disembody our soul from our self to arise. But can we escape our images, our metaphor of the monetary prize, and put a price on love without prostituting it; or employ the maze, invoke the spider's web, or utter a homonym for *fly,* without the spider remaining inside the net and at the deadly end of it? dare we make a move from the Minotaur's prison, so horizontal in its inclination, to the silken, ladderlike, ropelike, hairlike twist let down by Rapunzel from her tower, without secularizing, paganizing and compromising the purity of our ascent?

The power of this great poem depends upon the shadows its meaning casts upon its very enterprise.

Reading of the right sort would include the reception and interpretation of social signs, since the meaning of things and actions is the first language: voice, dress, manners, taste, discernment, choice, the way Rat Fuck drops his valise into the seat rather than places it there, the way he opens the clasp of—yes—you might call it—the carpetbag so his fist has to force its way through a reluctant opening, and how his hand mills about out of sight inside, feeling for what it eventually draws out: a spiral-bound, letter-size manual of some kind which he tucks in the netting where the airline magazine, airsick sack, and Technicolor catalogues of mid-brow knick-knacks and clutteralls, are kept—clocks set in golf balls, laser-disc racks, and other marvels.

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Chin Chin spreads his gaze about the cabin. Louise has decided on Chin Chin as her name for him. Chin Chin is not a very imaginative choice, and suggests someone vaguely Chinese. Rat Fuck isn't a very good name either. Chin Chin is wary of being watched. When Chin Chin's attention returns to his bag, his jaw drops with his glance, and folds of fat appear like a ruff around his neck. Chin Chin's ears have large lobes like fruit you might harvest. She has noticed that he gives strangers a slightly curious yet disdainful look as if he'd just inhaled them. Louise is going to use Chin Chin's name a lot right now in order to get into the habit. Otherwise she might forget.

The first language, the social tongue, gives the writer words and this is what he takes from reality. The most refined and illuminating perceptions of the world are worthless to the writer unless they write something. The second text depends upon the ear. For that's what a writer writes with—not the pen, the keyboard, or the screen—not by running with the bulls in Pamplona, not by beating up boyos in bars, not by enjoying an unfortunate marriage, dealing with leaks, clogs, dirt and three kids, not by holding the thinning fingers of your AIDS-eaten friend, alas, though it feels sad enough to be inspiring, for that kind of thematic content counts for nothing; so not through persecution at the hands of an evil State, either, which is why Heinrich Zeitung Muller-Müller was so hard on his imaginary East Germans, giving them no excuse, even as he understood their circumstances; because the apples in Cézanne's baskets, the pears on his plates, are as important as women, maybe Sabine's, raped.

Perhaps the Chairman's most notorious pronouncement expressed the artist's aim exactly. *#28. What seems beautiful to me, I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support . . .* "Dependent on nothing external" is the key phrase here. Rat Fuck's voice is high, with a guttural emphasis on consonants.

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Because Rat Fuck is a Rat Fuck, nobody gives a rat's fuck whether he speaks with a squeak like a mouse or roars like a lion. Therefore this detail does not bring to the text any strength borrowed from its being a brute matter of fact. Since the aforesaid vocal quality does not belong to any Rat Fuck in the real world, Fred is at liberty to describe its effect on others in any way the text requires. Picasso felt free to move the eyes in one of his outlined faces wherever his work wished, thereby demonstrating once and let's hope forever that art isn't anatomy. To be liberated from the claims of the referent is not to become a loose cannon on the canvas or the page. In the material world things connect with things; across musical space notes call to notes; in the mathematical realm, numbers take their place among other numbers; and even if we could collect Rat Fuck's daily sweat and weigh it, even if we sing out "Chilicothe" as the train pulls in, even if we can describe our summer vacation for our grade-school teacher, these useful facilities do not determine the validity of addition, the tunefulness of the town, the quality of our summertime fun, or the artistic excellence of any expression.

It is for this reason, the Chairman writes to Louise Colet, stringing his girlfriend along with artificial pearls, *there are no noble subjects or ignoble subjects; from the standpoint of pure Art one might almost establish the axiom that there is no such thing as subject, style in itself being an absolute manner of seeing things.*

And that's why right reading (through which the writer begins to learn the trade) must be for relations, continuities, balances, breaks, disembowelments of design, surprising restitutions of order; and that is also why oppressive governments regularly attack texts for the messages they imagine texts contain, when it is their form which may be subversive. Unless the shape of the State is changed, the new bureaucrats will function precisely as the old, and the awfulness of life will remain as before; and there will be queues for food, and queues for the phone, and queues for the use of the latrine, and queues for falling down, and queues for breaking faith;

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you will have to get in line to lie; and there will be others for chunks of coal, jars of cooking oil and fuel, queues for the use of the bed, for weeping as if alone, for fucking as if together, since there will be no really private life; only queues and the Red Lips who lick them so the end of the line will glisten and beckon; only queues calling for Rat Fucks to violate them; queues we form out of unhappy habit, as if one wizened cucumber or dried-up turnip were worth its penny purchase, even if it were imagined stuffed up some huffy functionary's ass.

Huge ears, large lobes, coarse black kinky hair, striped shirt, fat Semitic face, thick glasses in heavy frames, coat pocket full of pencils like a clerk. When Chin Chin sits down, she saw, he sits as if on tiptoe. From time to time he rests from his bizarre work by tilting his head back and staring at the gridded ceiling of the plane as though staring at the stars. Louise had watched with fascination as Chin Chin fairly forced his big bag back into the overhead, stopping to give the cabin a challenging inspection; but she missed the large shiny stainless-steel scissors he also took from the valise when he unpacked the notebook. Fred had seen a glinty something thrust by Rat Fuck behind the waist band of his trousers, and Fred's stomach had grown cold and seemed suddenly swollen, as if he had swallowed a bit of iceberg along with his lousy lettuce. But before Rat Fuck sat down the scissors—clearly shears—had appeared. He even snicked them twice to see if they still worked, but with a bit of braggadocio in the gesture which felt to Fred like the twirl of a pistol.

Yes, Fred thought, this plane is like the modern state all right. From flight to flight the passengers will change, the crews and pilots, too, even the mechanics who service the ship, and the handlers who crush the baggage, or the film that's sometimes shown, as well as the plane's destinations; but the seats will retain their numbers, the galleys will malfunction as they always have, the engines will rev, air will lamely circulate, miserable meals will be served; meanwhile the entire structure is growing older, of course, dirtier, more stressed, rivets as

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loose as change, the machine now on the chance edge of a flaming crash. If we were all words in the right sentence, then it would matter to the jet's engines that Louise was aboard, the rattle of the liquor miniatures in the drawer of the drink trolley would tell a tale, and the toilets would tremble at the thought of Rat Fuck's attentions, who has his spiral open on his tray table, and is glaring nearsightedly at it.

Why is this shit in *my* stream of consciousness, Louise wonders. This stuff belongs in Fred's head. He is always talking about the language the real writer writes in. Real writer! What was real about H.Z. Muller-Müller? What a mess! what a scandal! what an embarrassment! to be kicked out of a country that no longer exists. To find the hounds of the press baying beneath another tree. Then to have one's head tormented by theoretical thoughts like these, and one's eyes soiled by the sight of Chin Chin taking a roll of cellophane tape from his jacket pocket. Better to be bothered by fears of flying. Yes, death was the driver, wasn't it, the driver which drove these writers on, writers like Fred? each book a piece of memorial stone, as if their consciousness would continue to have a life between such sheets. Good writing depends on the mastery and integration in one instrument of all the levels of the learned language . . . O dear and damn, Louise said, I hate it when our heads get mixed . . . the heard, the read, the written . . . Louise would have walked about the cabin, fled these intruders, but she didn't want to disturb Fred, who was pretending to be asleep . . . writing written to be read, read to be heard, heard to be fully felt, felt to be remembered, remembered to be repeated, repeated to become a part of one's self, lines on one's soul like the lines of the face . . . Louise hated her lines, of course, wrinkles made of age and alcohol, work and marriage . . . lines like that of the Chairman's, Fred recalled, *#23,* for instance: *If you put the sun inside your trousers, all you do is burn your trousers and wet the sun,* lines which furrow the brow, lines which speak to the world of pain and its perseverance, pleasure and its price . . . what the hell is Rat Fuck doing now?

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He is scissoring strips from one page of the spiral, trimming each edge, and retaping them—some of them—onto other sheets. He manipulates the scissors and the tape with a surgeon's surety and swiftness, automatically, with flawless skill, his thoughts, so it seems, on the result of these recombinations, not on either cut or paste. The paper he would waste is crumbled in his left fist and stuffed behind the webbing where the flight safety card lives its useless life. Didn't William Burroughs scissor that way for a while? Ransom notes—yes—you could hardly say "composed"—were collaged in such a fashion, and page layouts too; he was possibly such a person, magazine menial, but no, not working from a notebook like that; by golly, sometimes he simply tears off a strip; Fred is transfixed, the rip is rapid and precise and can be heard, whereas the scissors is silent, the snicks too slowly made to send a signal. A few of the bands are wide, but most are as large as a line, and pasted down with a tape so broad it must cover them. Like flies in amber, now only light can reach the symbols.

Fred is transfixed and Louise languid, lulled by the loud murmur of the plane and by the two scotches she has put away. A blade slides through a page as though cutting pie. Louise has placed a pillow against the window from which Fred would have admired the tops of clouds, and there dreamed a world as pure as the snow of the poles. Now her head presses her curls into the plastic foam, layer after layer—pane, pillow, hank of hair, scalp shampooed to dryness, thin carpet of flesh before the bone—lying between stratospheric cold and drowsy consciousness, more than a cushion, these many barriers keeping thought from acidifying the passing clouds, and cold from compressing every feeling like a fistful of frozen fingers.

Fred stands in the aisle and, by stretching, pretends to stretch, when in fact he is spying on Rat Fuck and on Rat Fuck's rapid pasting. What is he doing? what is he reading? what the fuck? Rat's scissors snick. Fred's curiosity is not quite out of control, but it has driven him to the edge of simply asking. He draws back in time, however, and instead leans obviously forward but behind the Rat's back and sees rows of

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differential equations—strange brackets and symbols shaped like banister endings—what the hell!—and at the top of the page being sliced eager blades were separating WAVE from PACKETS. The guy was cutting up a text in quantum mechanics.

Failing in physics, was he? Fred wanted to think, returning to his seat not quite at the speed of light. But the kid would have to be a graduate student, too old to be anything less. "Rochester," hadn't Fred heard his companions say? so he was a student at the University, or perhaps he worked at Eastman Kodak; he was possibly some electronic whiz; that might excuse him, weren't whizzes notoriously sloppy in their personal habits, lost in the stars, or in among the protons, quarking away without regard for normal niceties? But this plane was a nonstop to Chicago. You wouldn't go that route to . . . wait . . . it would have to be Rochester, Minnesota. That would be on the way. But what was in Rochester, Minnesota, besides Swedes? An institute, that famous hospital, what? not Sloan-Kettering, no, New York, the cancer college . . . clinic . . . the Mayo Clinic, that was it; but wave packets . . . ?

The fellow was obviously plugged in to the Comedy Channel, because he would giggle now and then while he cut up equations. Normal expository procedures were being rearranged before Fred's very eyes the way he had once hoped to rearrange the narrative flow—so it wouldn't flow any more—so it would pile up in one place, so that space would replace time in importance, and the movement of the line supplant the course of common action, prose would ponder its point, not run and leap and pounce, to pursue an end which he now renounced, an illusion which belonged to an outworn providential view of history and not to the contemporary world of . . . well . . . wave packets, black holes and chance. That fellow, Fred thought, he and I probably understand the geometric bridge between art and science. We—our minds—probably belong to the world of today. The difficulty was that the world of today was thinly populated. Most everybody's thinking about things seemed to be at least five hundred years in arrears.

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"Years in arrears—oh dear—years in arrears." Well, friends, have few fears, I have no intention of violating the maxims of my Masters, Bouvard and Pécuchet, and shall soon remove, with a pair of shears, the offending phrase, "years in arrears," since it is clear its skim-milk-melody offends the ear; but why, we must ask Flaubert, do words which jingle, jangle? What is the precise character of his complaint? I'll bet the answer is that such sing-song-along is childish and out of date; that it is suitable for Dr. Seuss, but that as we mature our speech should match our age. To continue with the Chairman at *#22. The time for beauty is over. Mankind may return to it, but it has no use for it at present. The more Art develops, the more scientific it will be, just as science will become artistic. Separated in their early stages, the two will become one again when both reach their culmination. It is beyond the power of human thought today to foresee in what a dazzling intellectual light the works of the future will flower.*

Putting waste paper and his own notes in his neighbor's vacated seat, the physicist walks down the flight aisle to chat with other passengers he seems to know—how is this?—carrying his paper coffee cup like a blessing rattle. Σ So he was probably an Iranian studying physics in the States in order to go home and build bombs. Σ But he might appreciate the point that the art of any art is abstract, since Islamic art is free of graven images, and often contents itself with creating fields of polygonal interlacing, highly rhythmical and continuous, though not without its significance, either, since the center of such a system is, like Allah, unseen, though the web is indeed a web, with a quality of relentless inevitability due to its repetitive interconnections, and a sense of quiet repose in the harmony of its geometric regularities.

A young woman with a heavy mop of blue black hair whom Fred had not noticed before (why not? she was rather good looking) rose from her seat near the front of the cabin and turned to face the Physicist who greeted her with a salute from his paper cup. "Ah, Melachrinos, there you are," she said in a loud penetrating voice, whereupon the Physicist bobbed his

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head and laughed a rather rich warm laugh like an unrolling rug. Good god, Fred thought, the guy is Greek.

And a quantum mechanic. Who might have imagined? Fred remembered that on one of the few occasions in which he had actually tried to teach writing (down on his luck in those days), he had placed a printed card above the door of the room in which his workshop was to be held. On it he had printed his favorite Platonism: Let no one enter here who is ignorant of geometry. And not a single student had enrolled.

THIS IS A READER'S ALERT. AN ADVISORY FOLLOWS: OBSERVE THAT THESE PARAGRAPHS HAVE SUDDENLY BECOME SEVERAL SENTENCES SHORTER THAN THEY ONCE WERE, AND TAKE APPROPRIATE MEASURES.

Fred began to realize with some shame that his estimation of the physicist had changed. Was he such a snob as that: to forgive Rat Fuck his fucking rat's race if he was found to be cutting apart wave packets on the airplane? even if he did ostentatiously pick his nose, and even if he was still overweight and freely perspired and tended to leave signs of his presence everywhere he went like an elephant foraging through undergrowth. Because an attractive young woman had greeted Rat Fuck, saying, "Ah, Melachrinos, there you are," did the physicist now deserve a diction drawn from Henry James, even if Fred's reservations about him remained? The qualities which constituted Melachrinos' appearance hadn't changed, but their relationship to one another had. It was as if Fred had simply read further on in the text, because, as one did so, each verbal combination shifted too (*Melachrinos, Melachrinos* was the name of someone he knew once), constantly redefining every relation, as well as one's sense of the significance of the whole.

That is the real secret of the art, Fred confided to himself as he wobbled his way toward the lavatory, looking for one of the first words you learned in any language: OCCUPADO. Fred preferred the phrase, "in use," though it had lost out long ago. Yet "in use" had some smell of the urinal to it still. You had to have the nose to catch even the slightest whiff

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from a word. You had to have a tongue which had tongued them and a memory of their tastes. How else could you hope to combine ingredients with some stew of success? No. *Stew* was a commoner's term for a commoner's dish. How about *fromage*, "some fromage of . . ." No, some gâteau then, "some gâteau of success." Yes. Fred smiled at the sight of his salacious soul, and said again: "you have to have the tongue to tongue them." *Melachrinos* was a poet's name. Fred felt in vain for the connection. Like a gnat it eluded him.

He didn't realize Louise was right behind him. "I've needed to go since we got on," she said, tapping his shoulder, and speaking softly to his ear. Suppose he denied her her desire? But Louise pushed past him and the VACANT sign de-lit. In a moment he heard her bolt the door and the letters of OCCUPIED grew bright. She'll take for fucking ever, Fred thought, and sighed. Stood a moment. Sighed again.

#43. In a work whose parts fit precisely, which is composed of rare elements, whose surface is polished, and which is a harmonious whole, is there not an intrinsic virtue, a kind of divine force, something as eternal as a principle? If this were not so, why should the right word be necessarily the musical word? Or why should great compression of thought always result in a line of poetry? Feelings and images are thus governed by the law of numbers, and what seems to be outward form is actually essence.

A perfect spot for contemplating important if not eternal truths, Fred felt: in front of an airplane's unisex toilet, thirty-five thousand feet in the air, over a world of very cold water, by a mind as bored as fully as its bladder. Here I am, like a text, Fred says to Fred, standing between need and relief, between aim and target, thought and its object. I'm in another goddamn queue. Waiting on wife—what's new? I make over everything I see and hear and feel into language, that's how I work when I am Text with a capital *T;* but not simply into language, any words, or any order syntax insists on; no, but into a specific flow of ideas; because it is impossible to reproduce this cabin I know lies behind me, even if I simply reeled

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off the lettered numbers of its seats, and recited the names of their occupants, and noted whether they were awake or asleep; my list wouldn't really resemble it at all; and when my head said "chair" it would say to itself, "that's flesh in French." "My flesh is sad, alas, and I have read all the books," it would quote. The reality is, my flesh is full of piss. My head has nothing on its mind but jet stream. There are two johns here. Why doesn't someone come out of one, and like my mama give me comfort?

Every phrase forms a unit, each sentence is a system and interconnects objects by means of their names, and these with concepts by means of their symbols, uniting *res extensa* and *res cogitans* at last, despite their irreconcilable differences, more firmly than Descartes did, through mere marks—amazing—with hushed sounds, sounds sometimes hidden out of anybody's hearing in the head, sounds chosen for their unimportance, marks selected for their ease of manufacture, since any five year old can write *pee* on a piece of paper and snicker like the candy. So suddenly, you see, both matter and mind are music. And as each new note arrives, sounding or shining, VACANT, for instance, like a sign in the sky, it rearranges everything; because a text, as it unfolds, first gathers its elements into its arms, making a unity, and then lets go its load like an armful of logs just to order up another, a more inclusive whole now, only to watch that combination erode, puddle, or explode, depending on the strategy . . . *explode* is the right word, hey, the sign says VACANT why is no one coming out? Hey, hey, a head, the head of a sallow-faced lank-haired juvenile (probably been whacking off, which might account for his sheepish grin), is appearing, easing its following body out like a bathrobe slipped from a hanger; hey, kid, outta the way; how do these damn latches work, I always—oh god—I always push them the wrong direction, hah, good, I am OCCUPIED . . . geeeeeeeez.

Some physicist, standing where Fred is standing, probably heard the hollow sucking roar the toilet makes when the flat metal flap falls after you flush, as Fred just did, and said,

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"That's matter entering a black hole . . . saaaaaauck . . . just like that . . . whooooooosh," and lives now like a slow fat cat on the proceeds of his Nobel Prize.

A perfect passage has a perfect pulse, and the final resolution, when it comes, consists not only of the ultimate order, and concluding significance which its nervously strung-out words have realized; but also the rate of dissolution and recombination the text has passed through like another rhythm; consequently one has to understand the initial positioning of the words as provisional, for they are everywhere at once, though making their modifications sometimes only in combinations, and acting, through the reader's obedient eye, mostly at a distance, simultaneously with others, creating an incredible vibration in the work as it rests so serenely on its page, with the result that the sound of the text, when its signs are properly recited, will seem made by the very shivering of the sense inside the line.

Relief at last, Louise thought, tilting her seat back into another passenger's dinky space and packing a couple of pillows behind her head. Maybe now I can enjoy the ride. Chin Chin was still standing in the aisle, engaged in an intense conversation with another, much older man. They were examining a book, and Chin Chin was pointing at something on one of its pages.

Crystals of his uric acid had been added to the atmosphere. Fred was not amused by the noise, which had always seemed threatening to him, as if the suction should reach up like Satan to claim his soul, and he would be left standing in front of the john as empty of self as of the self's piss and vinegar. There was no way of estimating the cost to his career of the catastrophic East German adventure. Once again, he had bladdered his work away, compromising it with worldly aims. If he understood writing correctly, there was no method for calculating the nature and course of even so much as a sentence in advance. The sentence had, as it came into being, a vaguely known function to perform, for there was nearly always a task underweigh which the fresh bit of text was expected to help

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complete; but what form that sentence would finally take or what new impulses it might instigate could scarcely be imagined. Fred invariably had a Project, a Commission, some Plan; there was inevitably an Occasion on which something about someone had to be said, so he had never allowed the medium to be his muse.

And that medium: wasn't it the whole history of man, all his evil errors, his few victories and occasional decencies, packed into the language he has used? buried in it like murdered bodies are in weedy fields, or gold bars in piratical chests, or dance cards and kids' games boxed and carried to the attic? . . . or maybe Thoreau alone in his woods, tending his journal like a field, writing words there wiser than the words of God.

Had not the Chairman written: *Yes, you must work; love art. Of all lies art is the least lying?* Well, he had worked, all right, but only to raise the wrong crop. He had felt unrecognized and put upon and had written to settle scores; he had taken a few stray Causes home and fed them so well they stayed; he had lusted after fame and the feeling of triumph; and he had courted readers like a whore. *Try to love it with a love that is exclusive, ardent, devoted. It will not fail you.* But Fred had forced forms upon his material as if it were cookie dough fated to celebrate Christmas. He knew that some of his narratives had a shape similar to the airplane's cabin, with labelled places where his characters were required to sit in fuddled puddles of stale air, mostly asleep, and with little room to act even during those marshmallow moments when they were awake. *Only the Idea is eternal and necessary.* Amen to that, he said, remembering to zip his pants.

The physicist still had his big butt parked in the aisle where he was haranguing someone. Fred could see him pushing his cart pell-mell toward O'Hare Airport's interterminal trains, though there wasn't any need to hurry. To reach Rochester, Minnesota? What was a sentence like, Fred asked himself one more time: a sentence was like a packet of waves. *There are no more artists as they once existed, artists whose loves and minds were the blind instruments of the appetite for the*

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Beautiful, God's organs by means of which He demonstrated to Himself His own existence. For his part, Fred knew he was himself only when he was writing well, a rare experience these days when he was flopping about like a fish in a net. Do not touch the Times and maybe the Times will not touch you. Was that Thoreau talking? Fred felt his presence more and more as the plane flew over Maine and headed down the St. Lawrence. Fred plopped in his seat beside his wife and opened the airline's magazine. He had nothing but scorn for its contents. He had written for it once. He had nothing but scorn for himself. The pay . . . hadn't the pay been good?

For such artists the world did not exist; no one has ever known anything of their sufferings; each night they lay down in sadness, and they looked at human life with astonished gaze, as we contemplate anthills. That was the conclusion of quotation #6. The seatbelt sign went on, and a stewardess's semi-seductive voice warned of turbulence ahead. Fat Butt continued talking, punching a calculator he held in his hand and literally putting his head in the crack of his new companion's book. Fred wondered if his wife would ever kiss him again. No. Fred wondered whether his wife would . . . What did wave packets tell Fat Butt about the human condition and the nature of man? Or why, having traveled this far, one would want to complete the journey, or, having gone, to go again, or, having been, to continue to be?

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

William Gass directs the International Writers Center at Washington University in St. Louis. His latest book, *The Tunnel*, is forthcoming from Knopf.
Peter LaSalle is the author of the novel *Strange Sunlight* and the story collection *The Graves of Famous Writers*. His work has appeared in *Best American Short Stories* and *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*. He teaches at the University of Texas at Austin and the Harvard Summer School.
Melanie Rae Thon has written two novels, *Iona Moon* and *Meteors in August*, and a collection of stories, *Girls in the Grass*. She is originally from Montana and currently teaches in the graduate writing program at Syracuse University.
Paul West has written many novels, including *Rat Man of Paris*, *Caliban's Filibuster*, *The Women of Whitechapel* and *Love's Mansion*, which won the Lannan Fiction Prize in 1993. His next novel is *The Tent of Orange Mist* (Scribners, 1995), and his upcoming nonfiction books are *Sheer Fiction* and *A Stroke of Genius* (Viking, 1995).

POETRY

Jennifer Ashton is a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University. Her poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *The Chicago Review* and *Poetry Northwest*.
Claire Bateman is the author of *The Bicycle Slow Race*, a collection of poetry. She teaches English at Clemson University in South Carolina.

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Scott Cairns directs Old Dominion University's MFA program in creative writing. His books include *Figures for the Ghost*, *The Translation of Babel* and *The Theology of Doubt*.

Katharine Coles is the author of *The One Right Touch*. She teaches English at Westminster College in Salt Lake City.

James Cummins lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Kent Gardien lives in Cuernavaca, Morelas, Mexico.

Eileen Hennessy's poems have been published in *Prairie Schooner* and *The Quarterly*. She works as a translator and lives in New York City.

Stewart James's forthcoming book is titled *Disturbances in Attention*.

Galway Kinnell is Erich Maria Remarque Professor at New York University. Houghton Mifflin will issue his new book of poetry, *Imperfect Thirst*, this November.

Timothy Liu received the 1992 Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America for his poetry collection *Vox Angelica*. He lives in South Deerfield, Massachusetts.

Stephen Leeds lives in New York City.

Jeredith Merrin, an associate professor of English at Ohio State University, is the author of a book of criticism, *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Uses of Tradition*.

Sarah Messer spent the fall of last year as a resident at the Ragdale Foundation. Her poems have appeared in the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Calyx* and *Witness*. She lives in Dexter, Michigan.

Jennifer Miller is a graduate student of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Victoria Schlegel lives in New York City and works for the American Center in Paris. "Like Unnatural Words" is her first published poem.

Stephanie Strickland received the 1993 Bittingham Prize for her book *The Red Virgin: A Poem of Simone Weil*.

Shawn Sturgeon's poetry has been published in *The New Republic* and *Western Humanities Review*.

J.C. Todd wrote the chapbook *Entering Pisces*. He teaches creative writing at Trenton State University in New Jersey.

Meredith Trede resides in North Tarrytown, New York. This is her first published poem.

Charles Tomlinson is a professor emeritus at the University of Bristol and an Honorary Fellow at Queen's College, Cambridge. His most recent volumes of poetry are *The Door in the Wall* and *Jubilation*. He has also written two books of prose, *Some Americans* and *Poetry and Metamorphosis*.

INTERVIEWS

Larissa MacFarquhar (Robert Gottlieb interview) is the senior editor of *Lingua Franca* magazine.

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George Plimpton (Louis Auchincloss), the editor of *The Paris Review*, is the author of *The X Factor*, due out this winter from W.W. Norton. A number of his sports books (*Out of My League*, *Paper Lion*, *Mad Ducks and Bears*, *Shadow Box* and *Open Net*) were brought back into print by Lyons & Burford earlier this year.

FEATURE

Alfred Kazin's *Writing Was Everything: Life as a Critic 1934–1994* is forthcoming from Harvard University Press.

ART

Pascal Bernier was born in 1960. He lives and works in Brussels. The photograph is courtesy of This History, New York City.
Hillary Leone and **Jennifer Macdonald** live and work in New York City.
Andrew Masullo was born in 1957 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The photograph is courtesy of Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York City.
Judy Pfaff was born in 1946 in London, England, and currently lives in New York City. All works shown are ink, oil stick and collage on paper 10 1/4" × 14 1/2". The photographs are courtesy of Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York City.

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